



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

HN 1PWM Y

ON TRIAL
BY ZACK

KD 2350

SHELF.....

ACCESSIONS. *38,270.*

THE BOSTON-LIBRARY SOCIETY.

ORGANIZED 1792. INCORPORATED 1794.

18, BOYLSTON PLACE.

Added *Sept. 27*, 1899.....

To be returned in five weeks. A fine of one cent.
will be incurred for each day this volume is detained
beyond that time.

CANCELLED

1940

1899

297 SEP 25

213 OCT 7-OCT 11

136 OCT 16-OCT 19

234 OCT 19-OCT 21

442 NOV 7-NOV 11

527 NOV 20-NOV 21

118 DEC 18-DEC 19

1900

404 JAN 18-JAN 22

344 JAN 26-JAN 28

504 Feb 10-FEB 17

638 MAR 28-APR 9

456 APR 11-APR 25

76 APR 28-MAY 4

605 MAY 17-MAY 28

507 JUN 7-JUN 12

288 JUN 15-JUN 20

490 JUN 28-JUL 3

570 JUL 28-SEP 1-

298 SEP 5-SEP 8-

574 OCT 17-OCT 19

1914

54 MAR 12

ON TRIAL

ON TRIAL

BY

ZACK

Gwendoline Keats.

THE
NEW YORK
PUBLIC
LIBRARY

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1899

~~K2250~~
KD2350

.83

c



COPYRIGHT, 1899, BY
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

3337
Y2250
Y2350

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
DAN FIGOTT BUYS HIS DISCHARGE	1

CHAPTER II.

THE HANDS OF A THIEF	8
--------------------------------	---

CHAPTER III.

HOW PHOEBE EVIDENTLY LOOKED AT THE MATTER . .	13
---	----

CHAPTER IV.

DAN FIGOTT ASKS HIMSELF A QUESTION	20
--	----

CHAPTER V.

THE LETTER	30
----------------------	----

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTAIN BRATTLE	37
---------------------------	----

CHAPTER VII.

PHOEBE'S RETURN HOME	44
--------------------------------	----

CHAPTER VIII.

	PAGE
THE VILLAGE INTERESTS ITSELF IN THE MATTER .	49

CHAPTER IX.

SILAS TRUSTGORE	56
---------------------------	----

CHAPTER X.

MARY ANNE WORT SEEKS COUNSEL FROM THE CAPTAIN	64
---	----

CHAPTER XI.

A CHOICE IN TIES	72
----------------------------	----

CHAPTER XII.

UNDER THE TALL ELM	80
------------------------------	----

CHAPTER XIII.

SILAS TRUSTGORE'S GIFT.	90
---------------------------------	----

CHAPTER XIV.

SUNDAY AT THE FARM	99
------------------------------	----

CHAPTER XV.

CAPTAIN BRATTLE LEAVES PHOEBE TO HER OWN DE- VICES	109
---	-----

CONTENTS

vii

CHAPTER XVI.

	PAGE
THE PEDLAR'S ADVICE TO LIARS	118

CHAPTER XVII.

FARMER PIGOTT GOES TO EXETER MARKET	126
---	-----

CHAPTER XVIII.

MARY ANNE WORT AND MARTHA STIGGINS ADJUST THEIR DIFFERENCES	138
--	-----

CHAPTER XIX.

SILAS TRUSTGORE COMES FOR THE FIVE POUNDS	149
---	-----

CHAPTER XX.

THAT WHICH LOVE WOULD DO	157
------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXI.

PHOEBE FINDS THE DEAD CAPTAIN'S LOVE LETTERS	169
--	-----

CHAPTER XXII.

PHOEBE'S REQUEST	178
----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXIII.

SARAH EMMET SPENDS AN EVENING WITH SILAS TRUSTGORE	186
---	-----

CHAPTER XXIV.	
	PAGE
THE LETTER CHANGES HANDS	195
CHAPTER XXV.	
SARAH EMMET'S REVENGE	203
CHAPTER XXVI.	
MRS. FIGOTT CONSIDERS THE MATTER	212
CHAPTER XXVII.	
SILAS AND DAN	221

ON TRIAL

ON TRIAL

CHAPTER I

DAN PIGOTT BUYS HIS DISCHARGE

It was after the battalion had received orders to keep itself in readiness for service in India that Dan Pigott, who had no love for soldiering, bought his discharge. He left the Aldershot barracks, and catching a train running south, arrived that afternoon at a small country railway-station in Devonshire. His home, some fifteen miles distant, lay on the border of Exmoor. Directing that his trunk should be brought on by the carrier, he struck into one of the deep-throated lanes. It was June. High up over his head beech and holly intertwined branches, the sunlight shining through the leaves like the sun through the heart of a blue-green wave. A shower had fallen early in the afternoon; up

through the heavy grass rose the smell of the moist, warm earth.

Dan bared his head and drew in a deep breath. "Ay, but the country smells good," he exclaimed aloud. Then he stooped and turned up the bottoms of his trousers; for he was a careful young fellow, and a bit of a dandy. "I always hated soldiering," he continued, after a moment; "I should have been forced to have gone on with it, though, but for Phœbe. I wonder where she rose they fifteen pounds: I was most ashamed to take the money from her, and I sha'n't never have the face to tell the folk at home; but there, we're sweethearts, and I reckon that the thought o' India fell nigh as hard on her as on me." He was silent a moment, and taking out a pocket-comb, ran it carefully through his soft, fair moustache. "After all," he concluded, "I'm none so bad looking, and there's more than one girl who would have been proud to have done the like: only maybe they wouldn't keep as quiet about it as Phœbe; her always knows what be due to a man's feelings."

The road began gradually to ascend, the

moor unrolled itself with a great backward sweep, and far off sounded the tramp of the incoming tide. Dan's handsome, boyish face lightened up as his eyes fell upon the familiar scene: he quickened his pace; the trees grew sparser, then ceased; the road grassed over, widened, and split suddenly into a number of tracks leading across the moors. Turning to the left, and following the course of a stream, Dan saw in front of him a short thick-set man carrying a pack upon his shoulders.

"Why, Ben, be that you?" he cried—the soft colloquial note broadening his accent, as if the moor had already reclaimed and fashioned it.

The man addressed turned round, and showed a lean, rugged face, the eyes and mouth having a certain beauty of expression. He was middle-aged, and in the bearing of his head and shoulders there was unconscious dignity.

"Home from soldiering?" he asked, with the slow smile of a peasant.

"Yes; and fair glad o' it."

"Reckoned you had another dree years to serve."

"Bought meself out."

"Well, dang me then, if there ain't more money in soldiering than I reckoned on; or happen you ain't so flink with the silver as in the old days."

Dan coloured and made no answer.

"Ay, fifteen pounds be sooner spent than saved," said the pedlar. "Be you going back to work on the farm?"

"Yes; uncle said he wanted an extra hand."

The two men walked on awhile in silence, and then the pedlar remarked half to himself: "They say as how Phœbe Hazeldene up the farm has got into trouble; took some money that wasn't rightful hers."

Dan's face grew grey under his sunburnt skin. "It bain't truth you're telling me!" he exclaimed.

"Ay, 'tis true enough," the pedlar answered, glancing back, as the sound of approaching wheels smote on his ear. "Look'ee, there be the man from the Lion sent to fetch her. Folks say Tan Hazeldene won't have his daughter back home, and her's to live along o' her uncle—he that sailed the Saucy

Kate these twenty years ; but he's gived up the sea, and built hisself a bit o' a cottage t'other side o' the moor."

A man in a high dog-cart drove past them.

"Be 'ee on your way to fetch Phœbe Hazeldene?" the pedlar asked.

"Ess," the man answered, sullenly, "'tis a paid job; her iddn't no ways related to me." He disliked the errand, fearing that it might in some subtle way cast a slur upon him.

"Her comes of respectable folk enough," said the pedlar.

"And they may well need be," the man replied. "But there—her father is most of my opinion, I reckon: he says her shall never cross his doors again. Ay, her's a born thief: stealing without temptation. Wull, wull, as I said afore, her iddn't no relation of mine;" and whipping up his horse, he drove on.

For a brief moment Dan stood, white-faced and rigid, staring in the direction of the carriage, then with a half-articulate curse, he ran after it. "Stop!" he cried; "I'm going your way; I'm going to the farm. Give me a lift."

The man pulled up. "You be nevvv to old Mr. Pigott at the farm, ain't 'ee?" he said.

"Ess."

"I thought 'tworn't the fust time I'd zeed your face. Maybe you knows the maid?"

"Ess."

"Her must be a bad lot, stealing wi'out temptation; but there, that's a woman all over: they would a deal sooner steal wi'out temptation than with ut, 'tis my opinion."

Dan made no answer; it had been for his sake that Phœbe had stolen the money; the thought drummed through his brain and heart. He remembered the letter he had written to Phœbe when first the regiment had been ordered abroad—a letter dilating on the unhealthfulness of the station, full of fears for his own safety, a cowardly letter; and deep down in his heart he knew he was a coward, and the knowledge was hateful to him. Lashing himself into a fury of repentance, he determined to go boldly forward and take his stand by Phœbe's side. "It be true," he would say, "that her stole the money, but 'twor for me her did it—if

blame you must, blame me." Afterwards Phoebe and he would marry, and live things down. The phrase "live things down" pleased him; there was something fine about the sound of it; he had a keen sense for the histrionic in a situation. Then the cart slowly turned the corner into his uncle's yard; he saw two of the farm hands look across at it with a slow grin. The suspicion that he was the cause of their merriment thrust itself upon him; he jumped from the cart and strode away across the moor.

CHAPTER II

THE HANDS OF A THIEF

THE three men glanced after him.

"Dang me," exclaimed Abel Finch, the cow-hind, "if that bain't young Dan. Well, soldiering has taught 'un the use o' his heels, if it hasn't much else."

"There wor always more nature than sense about him," remarked the other labourer, slowly. "I s'pose you be come after Phoebe Hazeldene," he added, turning to the driver.

"Yes, the old Cap'en paid me for the job."

"And a poor job 'tis; I can't fathom it nohow; a quiet, straight-tongued lass——"

"Her made straight for the money anyway," said the driver, breaking into a jagged laugh at his own wit. "But there; if a woman does follow a straight line, 'tis when it

would best become her to hold back. I 'spose her has a deal to say for herself?"

"Na'r a word," exclaimed Abel Finch.

"Ay, her's a deep 'un, no doubt."

"I ain't never heard tell that her wor held for deep," Abel answered.

"Ah, that speaks for itself," exclaimed the driver, triumphantly. "You may be bound that her's deeper than most."

At this moment the house-door was opened from the inside—the men swung round, expectant, the driver's face fell.

"Tiddn't nought but her box," he said, as a stout, red-faced woman approached, dragging in her wake a tin box.

The driver took possession of it, and the men looked the box slowly all over.

"Ah," exclaimed the driver in a didactic tone, "the box o' a thief; wull, in my opinion, a thief shouldn't have no box. You can tell your misses that," he added, turning to the maid.

"I ain't heard as how the misses axed for your advice one way or t'other," she replied; and going back into the house, slammed the door.

The driver lifted the box into the cart. "I never had much opinion of women — speech or act," he said.

"I only knowed wan to judging point," returned Abel, "and her was saveful of everything except o' salt. There iddn't no doubt," he continued, reflectively, "that a woman's faults lie hard on a man's comfort."

"Ay," remarked the other labourer, spitting on the ground and then rubbing the spot clean with his boot, "the Almighty had man under the rib in more senses than one when he made woman. Happen, though, 'twor done unconscious."

"I agree with 'ee there," exclaimed Abel. "And many's the time I've told my wife the same. 'Susan,' I've said, 'depend upon it, if there had been marriage and giving in marriage in Heaven first along, 'tis little enough we would have been lawed to 'ave it here arterwards. Tiddn't no manner of use making laws up there for us down here.' But, bless 'ee, complaining won't work no difference—the Almighty's been at the trade too many years to alter now."

As Abel finished speaking, the house-door

opened a second time, and Phoebe Hazeldene came slowly down the steps towards them. A man leading a team of horses entered the yard at the same moment; he stood still, staring at her; a boy, who had been cutting wood, dropped his axe, and leaned forward to obtain a better view. The girl on whom all eyes were bent was small and slight, and as she stood flushing beneath their hostile gaze, she appeared in her defencelessness almost a child. She climbed into the cart: no one spoke, and she sat twisting her fingers; they were well-shaped and uncoarsened by work. The action caught the driver's attention; he glanced first at her and then round at the assembled men. His glance seemed to say, "A thief's hands; come and look at a thief's hands."

The others drew nearer and studied the hands; the boy craning up his neck eagerly.

"Crikes!" he exclaimed; "they looks like stealing."

Suddenly on the back of one of the hands a big tear splashed, and the men drew back, disconcerted. Unobserved, from a corner of the yard the pedlar had watched the scene.

He came forward, and leaning on the cart, glanced up into the girl's face.

"Things 'ull mend theirselves," he said gently. For a moment her tear-dimmed eyes rested on his face: then the driver mounted the box and drove out of the yard.

CHAPTER III

HOW PHEBE EVIDENTLY LOOKED AT THE MATTER

It seemed to Dan as he sped out across the moor that he heard the sound of derisive laughter echoing after him. He hurried blindly on, his mind struggling with a confused mass of thought. At last he flung himself down. Below him lay the farm, with its heavy thatched roof and red brick outbuildings. The light from the setting sun fell on the stacks of corn; the rooks flew from the elm-trees out across the freshly ploughed fields, where a lilac haze lay on the maroon-coloured soil.

"What call had her to steal? What call had her to bring shame on me and her?" he exclaimed with a rough sob. "Folks 'ull never forget it, and her has made me a fool before 'em all."

He looked across the undulating moor at the little farm below: his uncle had no children, and the farm would, in due course, descend to him. Dan had been secretly proud of his position as his uncle's heir; now it seemed that he could never rejoice in himself and his lot again; this was hard, because Dan had capacity for self-appreciation. There was a subtle irony in the fact that Phœbe, to whom he had always behaved with Quixotic consideration, should have shattered his happiness.

Phœbe was the daughter of the village carpenter, and from a worldly point of view had everything to gain by a marriage with Dan; and though he had refrained from pressing the fact upon her notice, he could not but be aware there was something generous on his part in thus abstaining. There were moments when he wondered if Phœbe quite saw the matter in the same light as he did; in some things she had proved herself strangely obtuse. His uncle had opposed the engagement, and now, lying on the moor, Dan recalled the afternoon when he had first broken the knowledge of this to Phœbe:

he remembered the generous warmth with which he had exclaimed: "Come what will, sweetheart, I'll stick by you!" and the flatness with which her reply had fallen on him: "Ay, Dan, and I'll do the same by 'ee."

It had come home to him with a keen pang that there was something lacking in Phoebe, an inability to see things as others saw them. For a few days his manner to her had been colder: as usual she had misunderstood the reason of the change, and instead of enlarging her view of him, she wept many bitter tears, totally failing to see anything but his displeasure; so that at last, from mere weariness, he had been compelled to take her back again into favour. Then with the provoking ill-logic of her sex, she forgot, in the joy of being pardoned, that she had originally given cause for offence; and he would have endeavoured there and then to clarify her vision of things, if he had not found an unexpected difficulty in defining her misdemeanour in words.

It had been after one of these dissensions that he had determined upon enlisting: he felt that absence from home would enable

Phœbe to weigh his value in a juster balance, and at the same time afford him an excellent opportunity of seeing something of the world. He had, however, soon wearied of barrack life; a touch of fever cured his desire for roving, and when later he learned that the regiment had been ordered to hold itself in readiness for service in India, he had been possessed with a sudden overwhelming terror of what might be in store for him in that land, where men died weird deaths at short shrift. Under the influence of this feeling he had written the letter to Phœbe, the result of which he had come to regret so bitterly.

"'Tis just like a maid to reckon that there iddn't anything shameful in stealing," he burst out. "Happen her thought that if I came back home, nothing else mattered."

His face softened: "Her's more child than woman," he added. Rising impulsively, he ran to a spot where, screened from observation by the tall bracken, he obtained a view of what passed on the road. Before him the hill broke away precipitately, and as he flung himself down in the fern, he heard the distant

crunch of wheels. His heart quickened a beat; in spite of his anger, the thought of Phoebe's near approach sent a curious thrill of pleasure through him. The cart came slowly into view: her head was turned in his direction; his heart thrilled again at the sight of her small, oval, tear-stained face; the childish, curving mouth a little open, and the eyes a lapis-lazuli blue that stared sadly out from beneath the dark brows at a dreary world. The driver had withdrawn as far as possible from her, and Phoebe, realising his distaste, had crushed herself back into the corner of the cart. Above and around her the moor swept out its lonely length; the little figure seeming to accent the general loneliness. A wave of compassionate love rushed through Dan: springing to his feet, he went to meet her.

"Phoebe!" he cried; "I've come back; you ain't alone!"

A great joy remodelled her face; instant, absolute, the metamorphosis was but one of those changes in her that Dan knew so well and found so illogical. It was as if she had entered into a new heaven and a new earth;

as if at sound of trump, a dead joy had sprung into life eternal.

"Dan!" she said; "Dan!"

He smiled in spite of himself; but his voice had a vexed sound as he answered—"Things iddn't mended right off like that."

Admonition was thrown away upon Phoebe, for her the sun shone full or not at all. Realising this anew, a feeling of helplessness fell upon Dan; he looked away from her across the moor. "Ay," he repeated to himself, "things iddn't mended right off the same as that."

The driver glanced curiously at them both. "Dang me!" he exclaimed, "but this is a queer start. I reckon old Farmer Pigott will have a spoke to put in the wheel."

Dan flushed; for the moment he had forgotten everything but Phoebe's interests: the driver's remark recalled him to his own; and it occurred to him that he had acted with considerable lack of foresight.

"I will be down to see your uncle soon," he exclaimed, and with a brief nod to the driver, he moved away in the direction of the farm.

Night had almost fallen; a grey mist

rolled up across the moor, and the wind rising, blew through a group of pollard thorn with a thin, spun-out wail. Dan halted and glanced back; the cart was no longer in sight.

"Her's so dependsome on me," he said; "and I have a sort o' feeling as if I should fail her."

The moon trod slowly out from behind the clouds; lifting his eyes, Dan sent winging through the great grey space a prayer to God.

"O God!" he exclaimed, "that I mayn't act cowardful this once."

It was the first prayer he had uttered since childhood: it comforted him.

CHAPTER IV

DAN PIGOTT ASKS HIMSELF A QUESTION

A LIGHT streamed across the farmyard as Dan entered, and glancing towards the house he saw the tall spare figure of Farmer Pigott standing on the steps. A sudden fear chilled Dan; he had always been afraid of his uncle, and knew in his heart that in return he had been despised. Instinctively he slackened pace, drawing back into the shadow of the wall.

"Be that my nevvv?" cried the old man.

The thin rasping voice jarred further on Dan's courage, and it was with an effort that he replied in the affirmative.

"Then come straight along in here," and Dan followed into the front kitchen, with its low-pitched, smoke-blackened ceiling. The table was laid for supper, but the room was empty. Farmer Pigott locked the door.

the action recalled unpleasant memories to his nephew's mind; instinctively his glance strayed to a heavy riding-whip that hung above the mantelpiece.

The farmer's keen eyes caught the direction of the glance.

"Maybe you knows your deserts?" he said, grimly.

Dan tried to pull himself together; there was no reason, he told himself, why he should be afraid, and yet he felt much as some whipped cur at the crack of the lash.

Old Samuel Pigott scanned him standing there, and an expression of contempt came into his lean, harsh face.

"I could swear you be at the bottom of this here business!" he exclaimed.

Dan winced. "I don't know what you mean," he answered.

"Mean?" repeated the old man. "Where did you get the money to buy your discharge?—that be what I mean."

There was a long pause, during which Dan sought vainly to put the truth into words: it seemed to him that never had he striven harder to state the facts and nothing but the

facts; and then, suddenly, as if in a dream he heard himself say, "I won the money on a horse."

He rubbed his sleeve across his forehead, a dazed wonderment taking possession of him. He had so desired to speak the truth, surely he could not be held responsible for a lie he had never meant to utter? There was time still to rectify the mistake: in a moment, he told himself, he would rectify it; but the minutes crept on and he did not speak, the words would not come.

"By the Lord!" the old farmer burst out at last, "if I don't believe you whinnied that poor little maid into stealing it for 'ee. I turned her out; and if I find you've lied, dang me if I won't neck and crop you after her!"

Dan made no reply. At the mention of Phoebe's name a vision of her rose before him; he was lying again among the bracken, and the hired cart, bearing the lonely little figure, was creaking its slow way across the moor: he watched the swift blossoming of happiness on the pale flower face, and in watching, his heart was wrung afresh. For

a brief moment manliness returned to him ; devoid of fear he saw into the future.

"There be something else I must tell you," he said. Raising his eyes, he met those of Samuel Pigott fixed upon him ; they seemed to probe deep down into his nature and draw all that was despicable in it to the surface. The words that he had meant to utter forsook his lips.

"I'm sorry I came back along home," he exclaimed, huskily.

Farmer Pigott burst into a rough laugh. "You would always have been afraid o' sommat, Dan, wherever you might be," he answered. "If 'tiddn't the fever, 'tis what's as bad."

There sprang up in Dan's heart a sudden hatred of this man, who seemed in some subtle fashion to force him to play a coward's part. Glancing hurriedly back on the long page of his boyhood, he saw the same rôle assigned to both, and a quick anger flamed up within him.

"I could curse you for making me the cur that I be," he exclaimed. For a brief moment his eyes met his uncle's on equal

terms; then his anger died down, and he turned away with what sounded much like a rough sob.

There was little conversation at supper that evening. From time to time Mrs. Pigott heaped some special dainty onto Dan's plate; but he seemed to have little appetite. Old Abel Finch, who was allowed to dine at the same table, cast an envious glance at the untasted food.

"Zims as how soldiering daintifies a man!" he exclaimed at last. "Things must have changed a deal from what they wor in my father's time—they fed 'em on soup or some such in they days—many's the time I've heard him tell how 'twor bones for one and water for t'other; but the broth it bided long o' the cook. Eh!" he added, pushing his chair slowly back, and turning to Dan: "I'll be bound you've seen a deal; a man larns quick in furren parts—'tis smart begun and smart done over there, I reckon."

"They have their good points same as here," Dan answered, a little wearily.

"I ain't for denying thic," replied the cow-hind, scratching his head. "A place

takes knowing the same as a man, and the worst o' 'em ha' their good moments. Nater is a queer thing; the biggest liar than ever I laid eyes on got himself jailed to save his friend; folks said that 'twor a poor trick that his 'ventiveness played him, to run dry jest when he needed the tap most—but law, a liar's fancy is but human after all is said and done."

A grim smile flickered for a moment across Farmer Pigott's face. Rising, he drew his chair up in front of the fire. "It takes a deal o' practice to make a decent liar," he remarked, as he filled his pipe and lit it with a hot coal from the hearth—"tho' they don't spare themselves, eh Dan?" he added, turning towards where his nephew had been seated; but Dan had slipped away unperceived.

That night when the others had retired to rest, Mrs. Pigott knocked at her nephew's door. The moonlight shone full into the room as she entered, on her kindly face and plump person.

"I've brought 'ee a drop o' gruel, lad," she said. "I thought may be you would lie cold the first night."

She sat down on the edge of the bed while he drank the gruel, her glance straying round the room. The sight of his fishing-rod on the wall, and the case of birds' eggs on the table, called up in her memory a vivid picture of him as a boy; then her eyes fell on him lying carelessly propped against the pillow, and she noticed with a pang that the look of boyishness had gone from his face.

"I kept your things fine and dusted," she continued in a matter-of-fact tone, "though I was forced to throw away that stuffed otter you thought such a deal of; he did smell that powerful strong."

Dan put the cup down on the chair and looked up into his aunt's comfortable red face.

"You minded on me, then?" he asked.

"Ay, I minded on 'ee," she answered.

They were both silent for a while; in the room nothing stirred but the shadow of a creeper that the moonlight flung across the floor.

"This be but a poor home-coming for 'ee, lad," the old woman exclaimed at last.

A sob rose in Dan's throat and choked his utterance.

"Your uncle be kind o' heart for all he be harsh o' tongue," she continued, taking one of the young fellow's hands in hers. "I ain't lived wi' him thirty years wi'out being able to testify to that. Ay, he's an upright man; never owed a penny in his life and never will. He understands hisself, and acts according: the Lord constructed him simple and he acts simple,"—she was silent for a moment, sunk in thought—"but sometimes it comes over me," she continued meditatively, "that other folk be a closed book to him. Well, well, how I do run on to be sure, and you that tired you can scarce keep from falling asleep."

Dan put his arms round her and dropped his head down on the plump motherly bosom.

"Bide a bit; us ain't seen each other this long while," he said. She ran her fingers gently through his hair, while the shadow of the creeper swayed to and fro on the moon-swept floor. Dan pressed his face closer against her.

"I've acted black again," he said, hoarsely, "and I would have given a deal to have played fair."

She did not question him: she was used to Dan's confessions—his lapses from virtue—his crude fits of repentance. Her heart ached, but cherished no higher ideal for him. Suddenly, subtly, the knowledge of this came home to Dan.

"Aunt," he exclaimed, and she noticed the note of fear in his voice, "you don't really reckon that I'll ever change—do you?"

The question troubled her: Mrs. Pigott was a woman not given to analysing her feelings; but it required little to bring home the truth of what he said. Her natural kindness and veracity struggled the one against the other, the battle resulting in a draw.

"You be only three-and-twenty, and youth's learning-time," she answered evasively, turning away.

Dan stared through the open window out across the fields, and the soft measured sound of cows cropping penetrated the quiet room. He had been so certain of his

aunt's affection that it had never occurred to him before to call her faith in question. There seemed something unique as well as cruel that she, whom he had always looked upon as his best friend, should fail him just when he needed her most. For a moment he rebelled bitterly, then his mind, which unwatched by him had been gathering material for a startling question, propounded it.

"What," it asked, "had he done that he should be trusted? Why should any one believe in him?"

Deserted by man and by himself—face to face with the bitter need of an unearned character for rectitude—the utilitarian side of virtue was brought grimly home to Dan.

"I want to reckon things out," he said;
"I want to bide quiet and think."

And his aunt rose and left him.

CHAPTER V

THE LETTER

THE echo of Mrs. Pigott's footsteps died away, and with it Dan's desire for self-contemplation. A fear of the vision his mind might call up fell upon him: with the shaping of the fear there was shaped also the vision of that which he dreaded: fellowship—strange, terrifying—was forced upon him, and through the long grey hours of night he was compelled to keep tryst with himself—himself not as he wished to be, but as in truth he was.

When the first streak of dawn appeared in the east, Dan rose and looked tremblingly out across the fields: a dread had arisen within him lest the face of familiar things should look familiar no longer; lest the grass should have lost its greenness, the scent of dew be gone from the warm earth. Nothing

was changed, and it seemed to him that he could never gaze his fill upon the homely scene. The sun had risen high in the heavens, and the house re-echoed to the sound of movement when at last he turned, flung himself upon his bed, and slept.

Many hours later he awoke and found his aunt standing beside his bed, a troubled expression upon her kindly face.

"Why, Dan, lad," she exclaimed, "it's gone ten. You ain't no ways feeling ill? Are you?"

He stared at her with dazed eyes. "I reckon," he said, "I've been dreaming most unusual strong."

"Well, get up smart, that's a good lad," she answered, looking relieved, "and let me get the breakfast things out o' sight before your uncle comes back; he iddn't no friend to late rising."

The noonday meal over, Dan slipped away to the moor. He walked in the direction of Captain Brattle's cottage. When he parted from Phœbe the previous evening, he had had no intention of seeking her out again so soon; but to-day he had a personal need of her; he

wanted to be rehabilitated in his own estimation, to be aroused from this disquieting dream into which he had fallen, and find himself once more the old Dan with whom he had lived on good terms and been so well content.

The fresh breeze blew in his face, and the scent of the heather rose soft as the cloud shadows that chased each other across the moor. Dan's eyes brightened, a sense of physical wellbeing exhilarated him. A drove of ponies scampered past, their long tails swept out spear-shaped in the wind. Dan had a natural tenderness for animals, and they reciprocated his affection. The remembrance of this filled him with sudden satisfaction.

"They trust me," he exclaimed, "and they knows. Why, there was a dog up to the barracks that fair worshipped the ground I trod on. I reckon the poor little tart misses me."

His self-satisfaction began to glow softly at the thought of the dog's devotion.

"Animals sees into a man's heart instinctive," he said.

Halting a moment, he gazed back upon the farm: the corn stood high in the fields,

the colour seeming to sway from blue to green as the wind raised and bowed the tall stalks. Near by was a wide sweep of fallow-land. It had been a dry spring, the fields where the hay crop had been taken off had run to a soft puce brown, the cattle had strayed to the lower meadows, standing knee-deep in the pond to rootle among the reeds. It was a scene such as Dan loved, and he dwelt on it with contented eyes. Little by little his repose, of mind returned, and his pressing need of Phoebe left him. He fell into a reverie; his thoughts leapt forward to the day when he, owner of the farm, would figure as a man of some importance, respected alike by his fellows and himself. The mental vision pleased him even more than the fair landscape spread out at his feet. Suddenly his thoughts recurred to Phoebe; with an abrupt start he awoke from his dream—there was no room for her in the vision.

“Her’s spoilt it all wi’ her stealing,” he burst out angrily. “I be a fool to think o’ marrying such a maid.”

At this moment the cry of a sheep in dis-

tress attracted his attention. Glancing round, he saw at some little distance a lamb that had cast itself. On closer examination he found that one of the animal's fore-legs had been injured, and that it could not stand. Raising it in his arms, he began to retrace his steps towards the farm. As he neared home he met his uncle, riding a black gallo-way mare. He looked at Dan with a kinder expression than usual—he regretted, too, having spoken so sharply the previous evening.

“There now,” he exclaimed, “I had meant to tell ’ee to give an eye round the moor for the sheep, and dang me if you ain’t been and done it of your own gumption. ’Tiddn’t like ’ee that, eh, Dan? But there, may be you reckon some day to stand in my shoes and be a farmer yourself.”

Dan glanced up, his face glowing: “You set me the work and I’ll do it,” he answered, with boyish eagerness.

Farmer Pigott turned his keen eyes full on his nephew; for a brief moment the natures of the two men were in accord; for once Dan did not shrink from, but met the gaze directed on him, squarely.

"Us be uncle and nevvv," the old man exclaimed, at length. "You act fair by me, and I'll act fair by you. There's my hand on it."

Dan grasped the outstretched hand in his own, the feeling of resentment which had taken so strong a hold of him the previous night vanished as he did so.

"I'll make a fresh start," he said, the well-worn formula rising instinctively to his lips.

Farmer Pigott smiled. "Ay," he answered, "and let it have a bit more bottom than most of they fresh starts o' yourn." Stooping, he took the lamb from his nephew, and placing it in front of his saddle, rode on.

Dan watched him, the look of pleasure dying out of his face. "I can't make no fresh start," he burst out bitterly. "I'm tied neck and heels: 'twas low down o' Phoebe never to give no hint that the money was stole, there would ha' been no call for lying then; but her never said nought; never a word—I have the letter in my pocket now."

He began searching for it, first carelessly, and then with quick gathering alarm: the letter had disappeared.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "I've lost it."

His mind, tense with alarm, vibrated to the twang of thought, quivering with quick visions of the future.

“Uncle will find that letter; he’ll turn me out: the farm ’ull never be mine.”

Then he cursed Phoebe for the thief that she was.

CHAPTER VI

CAPTAIN BRATTLE

WHEN Phoebe's uncle, Captain Brattle, was compelled, owing to a sudden stroke of paralysis, to sell his sloop, the Saucy Kate, he built himself a cottage on the cliffs. In shape it somewhat resembled the boat in which he had sailed for so many years; and indeed, to the casual observer, the little cottage seemed ever on the point of launching itself forward into the sea that lay leisurely in wait below. A terrace led from the front of the house to the flag-staff, and Captain Brattle, who was what the villagers called "a notional man," had invented a chair which, working on a system of pulleys, shot in and out of the rooms, down the terrace, and against callers in a fashion that every one except the inventor found alarming. There were a good many visitors to the cottage, though the spot

where it stood was lonely enough, people dropping in from time to time either for a gossip, or to consult the Captain on some knotty question.

"Folks can stand by the advice o' 'ee," they would exclaim: "and what's more, his cider is the best on the country's side."

In the eyes of Hannah, the Captain's servant, who was as sharp of tongue as of visage, these visitors were apt to cut a sorry figure.

"They comes for the advice, but they stays for the cider," she grumbled. "But, bless 'ee, they takes to the last a deal the fonder o' the two; but there——" she would add, "that's the men all over, and marriage wi' such is but turning on an extra tap in your back yard."

It must be admitted that the place held by men in Hannah's estimation was a low one; she looked upon them as creatures of small intelligence, to be humoured one moment, scolded the next, and governed always. The exception to this rule she found in her master, and she bestowed on him an esteem which, though it did not extend to his opin-

ions as opinions, enabled her to respect them as idiosyncrasies of a person that she loved.

It had been on Sunday that the news of Phœbe's theft had first reached the cottage. Mrs. Hazeldene had arrived in a hired cart during Hannah's absence at church. Hannah's affection for the Captain did not extend to the other members of his family, and for Mrs. Hazeldene she had an unqualified contempt: "A fluent-teared child-bearing woman," she called her; and when later she learned the origin of the visit, her feelings towards the intruder were by no means mitigated. She felt that there was an attendant disgrace in being a relative of Phœbe's which the Captain could not wholly escape; she would have had him sever all connection with the family; and that he should choose such a moment to accent his relationship by taking the thief into his own home, gave Hannah food for much bitter thought.

"'Tis just like him," she exclaimed, as, with unwilling hands, she prepared the bedroom for Phœbe's reception. "'Tis just like him to be acting the relation when most folk would have been laying cold to kinship."

She glanced round: the room with its soft flowered muslin curtains impressed her as far too dainty for the person who was about to occupy it. All day the housewifely instinct at the bottom of Hannah's heart had been waging war with her conviction that the lines of a thief should not be cast in too pleasant places. The Captain had picked some flowers for the dressing-table, and she arranged them grudgingly. She could hear him wheeling his chair up and down the terrace as she did so.

"He's been teetotuming in and out of the house the live-long day," she exclaimed aloud. "My head fair whirls at the sound o' the wheels. It seems flying in the face o' Providence for a man whose legs are paralysed to be pranking round the same as he do. When the Almighty dries up a man's muscles I reckon He means that man to bide quiet—but, law bless 'ee, the Cap'en seems to take his affliction as a sort o' challenge. 'Tis to be hoped that when his hour comes death will work a big change in him, for certain sure he'll turn heaven upside down if it don't."

She was silent a moment, shortening the stem of a rose. "Flowers! flowers!" she repeated bitterly, "there ain't no person outside o' the master who'd pick his best flowers for a thief—even if her was his niece, shame on the relationship. He's been after me all day to make scones; but there, that is just what I sha'nt do. 'Tis bad enough to be spoiling o' honest folk, but when it comes to tempting the stomach o' stealachious persons, why then I reckon 'tis about time to stay your hand. He ain't got no true sense o' things, the master ain't; 'tis always the way wi' your notional men: they can see through to-morrow fast enough, but a window is a brick wall to 'em. Law, if he had his way the wicked would live on the fat o' the land, and the righteous would lose their sense o' difference."

There was a sound of wheels as she spoke, and, looking out, she perceived that Phoebe had already arrived. She cast a quick scrutinising look down; the girl raising her head at the same moment, their eyes met in a long glance. The small face, on which the slight elusive bloom of childhood still lingered, dis-

armed Hannah by its air of extreme youth, and deep down in the woman's heart the desiccated germ of pity stirred into faint new life.

"Maybe her would have acted different if her had been brought up different," she exclaimed.

On the terrace below the Captain was awaiting his niece. Phœbe had always been a favourite with him; he had loved her since the time when, as a small red-faced baby, she would sit, his finger gripped tight in her fat puckered fist, gazing at him with deep inquiring eyes.

Now, as he listened for the sound of her footsteps on the gravel walk, his heart ached. She approached slowly, hesitatingly, and stood before him with bent head.

"Phœbe," he said; "little maid," and putting out his hands, drew her towards him.

She sank down at his feet and hid her face against his knee.

"Why didn't 'ee ask your poor old uncle for the money?" he exclaimed, smiling sadly. "I shouldn't ha' grudged it to my little maid."

A shiver passed through her, but she answered nothing.

"Poor child! you must ha' wanted it terrible strong," he said musingly. "What made 'ee do it, Phoebe? What drove 'ee to it, little maid?"

Again a shiver passed through her. The question had been put many times during the past few days; but to all alike she had returned no answer; alienating by her obstinate silence those few who at first had been inclined to pity her. She loved her uncle: her heart was sore with wounding.

Raising her tear-stained face to his: "I've brought disgrace upon 'ee all," she exclaimed, brokenly. "Nothing can put things right,—nought, never."

CHAPTER VII

PHOEBE'S RETURN HOME

THE days crept slowly away till June was numbered with the past months; colour lay longer on the moor; the tall fronds of bracken reached up higher, spreading out a more generous shelter; the robins fell to singing; and Phoebe, as she listened to their thin, sweet song, said to herself: "Dan will come to-day."

But the days passed and Dan did not come.

Each morning when the sun rose and swept the heather with broad fields of light she stole from the bed, threw back the lattice, and gazed out across the moor. From time to time the voices of people passing on the road below penetrated the room, and once she caught the sound of her own name. The speakers were two men.

"Ay," one of them exclaimed, "the maid lives in there now along o' her uncle. Tan Hazeldene wouldn't have her back home. He be a hard man. They say his wife went down on her knees to him to forgie the lass and let things be as they were afore; but he wasn't to be turned; there's no gain-saying o' he. Some folks reckon that 'tis small blame to him; 'tiddn't no light thing to have a child disgrace 'ee, same as his darter did he; but 'tis sore work for the wife, poor soul; women ain't got the self-pridefulness a man has, and you can't reason 'em into it."

"I heard tell down to the Lion last night that her had falled ill; brought to bed afore her time," the other answered.

"Be that so?"

"Ess, vath, the child was born dead, and her's like to valler," and so talking they passed out of earshot.

Mechanically Phoebe reached down her hat and shawl and went out. Her home lay some twelve miles distant across the moor, and she hurried forward, the July sun beating hotly upon her. Panting on, sometimes

breaking into a short uneven run, she crossed now wide tracks of heather, drooping beneath its weight of honeyed bees, and now a brown clearing, where the fire having made way, the herbage would creep up green and scented the following spring. High over her head the air rippled with the song of larks; their joyous notes pursuing her and forming an ironic accompaniment to the forebodings of her heart. It was past noon when she reached the village. It straggled half way up a steep hill, at the foot of which, standing in a small garden, and a little back from the main street, was the Hazeldenes' cottage. Near the house a number of villagers had congregated, talking in subdued tones. Seeing her they fell suddenly silent, glancing from one to the other. She pushed open the wicket gate, passed hurriedly up the path, and entered the cottage. The small kitchen seemed full of people; Bobby, her youngest brother, a boy of eight, ran forward and caught her by the gown. Stooping, she mechanically freed her dress from his grasp, but her eyes were fixed on an old hump-backed woman

who was sitting before the fire drinking tea. She was evidently, for the moment at least, a person of some importance, for the others stood near ministering to her needs.

"Lord help us!" exclaimed one of them, "if 'tiddn't Phœbe Hazeldene come home. They must ha' brought 'ee the news mortal quick. 'Tis a true saying ill tidings flies apace."

The girl paid no attention to her, but turned almost fiercely on the old woman.

"What be you doing here?" she asked in a hoarse voice.

The woman rose, the dignity of office upon her: "They called me in to lay out the corpse," she answered. "I always promised Susan Hazeldene that I would lay her out wi' my own hands; and a fine corpse she's made. Ay, your mother was built for death; her never looked a patch o' herself when her was alive."

Turning from her, Phœbe passed up the stairs to her mother's room. The blinds were down, a grey light fell on the scanty furniture, and on Tan Hazeldene as he stood and stared rigidly down on his dead wife's face

with its air of indestructible repose. Lifting his eyes from the dead to the living woman, he marked how detail by detail the grim picture imprinted itself on the girl's mind, and watching, it seemed to him as if death had entered upon a second heritage.

His eyes, sullen with despair, glowed vengefully.

"Come," he said, "and look upon your own work."

She swerved forward. Gripping her by the arm, he half-led, half-carried her to the bedside.

"Look!" he exclaimed thickly—"look—her suffered—mark her face. Do 'ee see they lines?—death couldn't smooth 'em."

Then with sudden cold rage he pushed the girl before him from the room, down the stairs, through the garden, out into the street.

"Go!" he cried—"and my curse go with 'ee!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE VILLAGE INTERESTS ITSELF IN THE MATTER

SOME short time before, Dan, riding a thoroughbred chestnut mare, had entered the village and made his way leisurely to the Lion. The inn with its heavily gabled roof stood near the church and almost opposite the Hazeldenes' cottage. Dan having stabled the mare, entered the bar and called for a glass of beer.

"What's the excitement?" he asked, pointing, as he spoke, to a group of people collected outside.

The innkeeper drew the beer before replying. "Mrs. Hazeldene be dead,—and law bless 'ee, there iddn't nought ekal to a death to draw the silence out o' folk."

"Dead!" Dan re-echoed.

"Ay, dead," the man answered; "and the

happier for being quit o' her troubles, I shud reckon, though they say the poor soul went unwilling. I be a mint sorrier for Tan Hazeldene than her anyway. He's had a deal o' misfortune this last dree months, what wi' his darter taking to stealing, and one thing and t'other. The maid be over to the cottage at this very minute."

Dan turned sharply round to the window and made no reply. The innkeeper drew himself a glass of beer.

"Their bees swarmed low this spring," he continued meditatively. "Folks tell that thic be a sign o' ill luck. Susan Hazeldene wor mortal put out over the same; and well she might be, for 'tworn't a matter o' eight and forty hours arter, that she heard her darter had turned thief."

The blood rushed to Dan's face: he could not hear Phœbe stigmatised unmoved.

"Maybe her iddn't half the thief that folks think her," he exclaimed hotly.

"'Twor thickey news that killed her mother for all that her died in childbirth," replied the innkeeper. "But there," he continued, "I ain't one for heaping ills on the

maid's head; life 'ull do that for her smart enough, mark me if it don't."

Dan shuddered. He realised in sudden rapid vision something of the suffering Phœbe had brought down upon herself, and his heart went out to her in pity. He had striven hard of late to banish all thought of her from his mind; striven by burying himself in the present to hold the future at bay. Still there had been moments when his conscience refused to be deadened; when in thought at least he could not endure to believe himself capable of deserting Phœbe; moments in which he lay balanced on a hideous scale of inaction, with neither the courage to do wrong or to do right.

The innkeeper, who suffered from rheumatic gout, hobbled slowly across the floor and joined him at the window.

"I've axed meself scores o' times," he exclaimed, "whatever could have come over the maid for her to take to staling! There iddn't a prettier spoken lass on the countryside; no, nor one whose features favour her more. Well, well, a man has to look to sommat else aside the vantysheeny in woman.

Her'll never find no self-respecting lad to keep her company arter this, and her would ha' made a pretty bride; they eyes o' hers be wonderful soft and timersome."

Dan shifted his position from one foot to the other, and as he did so the crowd outside became suddenly agitated, carried forward, in a closely-pressed herd, to be as suddenly swept apart into a long, heaving, palpitating lane.

A moment later and the massive head and shoulders of Tan Hazeldene appeared above the crowd. Half dragging, half carrying Phœbe, he moved between the living lane of people, and was not conscious of their presence; his eyes were fixed upon the future; he saw it before him as some desolate vast stretching plain on which his daughter must wander an outcast forever.

"Go!" he exclaimed, thrusting her forward, "and my curse go wi' 'ee!"

He turned and left her. The crowd swung back from the slight shrinking figure with sudden repulsion. She stared at them dazedly, then raising her eyes, fixed them on Dan. For the time her power of vision had deserted

her, and she did not see him ; yet never had her glance moved him more strongly. It was as some great cry of distress from the primal woman in her to the primal man in him. Flinging open the window he turned his white passionate face on the crowd, and they, their attention attracted by the sudden thrust up of the sash, peered back at him. For a moment he seemed about to jump into the street, then becoming conscious that all eyes were focussed on him, he slunk out of sight behind the portly figure of the innkeeper.

Phœbe disentangled herself from the crowd and began slowly to ascend the long hill. A boy picked up and flung a stone after her ; it fell wide of the mark, and some children yelled derisively, partly at her, partly at the thrower of the ill-directed missile. The church clock struck two, and the villagers, bethinking them of their duties, hurried back to work. Taking up his hat, Dan left the inn ; the street was almost empty, and no one paid any attention to him as he walked hastily away in the direction that Phœbe had taken. Soon the village lay behind him ; he quickened his pace to a run ; far

out on one of the wide silent wastes of the moor he found Phoebe, took her in his arms, pressing her close to him, so that her tears fell upon his face.

"Sweetheart, little maid," he said, "I can't a-bear to see 'ee suffer. I can't a-bear it."

But her tears fell and fell, though she did not know that she wept.

"Don't 'ee take on so, dear heart. Don't 'ee take on so," he urged.

Disengaging herself from his arms, she flung herself upon the turf, and he watched her quick convulsive sobbing with helpless misery. After a while she ceased to cry, and raised her small, sad, tear-puckered face to his. He knelt down and took the girl's hands in his own, and all that was of worth in his crude ill-strung nature seemed to come into his eyes and look out at her.

"Help me to be a better man," he said, "and us'll win droo yit."

Enthusiasm radiated from him and invoked in her a feeling of half-sad, half-tender pride.

"I've done nought but bring shame on 'ee,"

she answered; "but, oh Dan, 'tis a vine lad you be in spite o' it."

He stood up, squared his shoulders, and the expression of extreme youth that had of late deserted his face returned.

"I've acted the coward long enough," he exclaimed. "I reckon 'tis about time I turned man," and, speaking, it seemed to him as if he had already had the bitted future between his knees and rode it with whip and spur.

Some little distance below the spot where they were standing ran a road, and along it at this moment rumbled a heavy wagon. The driver hailed them.

"I be going past the Cap'en's cottage and can gie Phoebe Hazeldene a lift if the same suits her," he said.

After a short consultation the girl climbed into the wagon, and Dan watched it slowly disappear from view.

"I'll stick to my guns; I'll not play the d——d deserter," he muttered.

CHAPTER IX

SILAS TRUSTGORE

RETURNING to the inn and entering the stables, Dan found that the hostler had slipped the rug off the mare's shoulders and was contemplating her with a critical air.

"Maybe you calls me in mind," he said, lifting a pair of long narrow-lidded eyes to Dan. "'Twor I that drove 'ee up to the farm the day you comed back along 'ome from soldiering. You worn't over and above sorry to ha' done wi' soldiering, I reckon."

The man's crafty bloodless face filled Dan with a sudden repulsion.

"Well," he answered, "and what o' thic?"

"Nought, nought," replied the hostler quickly; after a pause he added, "That bain't a bad animal that you've got here."

Dan was proud of the chestnut, and the last remark was more to his taste. "Her's

a beauty," he exclaimed with enthusiasm. "There's a shoulder for 'ee," and he brought his hand down on the mare's wither. "A man might reckon he had a church in front o' him—what do you call that for a length o' rein? And her's ribbed up smart too; none o' yer weedy ones, all blood and no bone. Uncle could get sixty for her any day, but he's holding back for a higher figure."

The hostler drew closer, and having picked up the mare's feet one by one, examined them attentively.

Dan watched him. "You can't find much the matter with that frog, eh?" he said.

"Zim's healthy anuff," the hostler admitted.

"Ess," continued Dan, "and the foot has a sound wall to it."

The hostler nodded. "A 'oss will last twice the time wi' a good wall to his foot; some be as brittle as glass. What height may her be?" he added, drawing back.

"Going on for sixteen hands. Her iddn't no bad investment."

Again the hostler raised his crafty eyes to the young fellow's face.

"There be money in her for somewan, no doubt," he said.

Dan made no answer, and after a pause the man continued—

"I knows a ginelman up Exetur way that be looking for her very moral this identical minute."

"Ah," said Dan, "and who be he, then?"

The hostler stooped down and picking up a straw put it between his teeth.

"A name be a tricky thing," he remarked didactically, "and wance out there iddn't no telling in whose mouth you'll find it next along. Law," he continued, "I've a name mesulf, but it be a marking thing, and I ain't never took to it."

"You be called Silas Trustgore, bain't 'ee?" said Dan. "I holds the name in mind 'cause I ain't met 'un in these parts afore."

"Ay, a name be a marking thing," repeated the hostler, regretfully. Dan scanned the speaker's wizened ill-built figure with contemptuous satisfaction; it seemed that in this man he had found a greater coward than himself.

"'Tis a queer thing to be afraid o' one's

own name," he said,—“but there,” he added, as he slipped the bridle over the chestnut's head, “I reckon 'tis about time I was off.” Glancing round, he found Silas Trustgore's eyes fixed full on him. “What be you gap-nesting at?” he exclaimed, sharply.

The hostler drew closer. “A smart lad in your place could turn an honest penny on thic mare,” he said, laying stress on the word honest.

“How?”

“There bain't no wan azide yourself that rides her.”

“Well?”

“Maybe you could find the mare iddn't as sound as her looks?”

“What do 'ee mean?”

“Farmer Pigott would ease his figure if he didn't hold her for sound, that's sartin.”

“Why, the mare's as sound as a bell.”

“Ay, maybe; but happen 'tiddn't to your advantage to reckon so.”

“Danged if I can see what you're driving at,” exclaimed Dan, “and what's more,” he added sharply, his contempt of the man increasing, “your wuds don't ring honest.”

"Ay, honest, honest," Silas repeated, "'tis a wud us all clings to: 'tis wonderful the things folks 'ull do and hold theirselves for honest. Why, I knowed a man wance who let his sweetheart do his staling for him and held hiszulf for honest."

Dan's face whitened slowly beneath his tanned skin; he glanced across at his companion, but Silas had turned away and stood staring abstractedly at the chestnut. "Now," he continued, "if the ginelman I knows on wor willing to gie seventy for the mare, and Farmer Pigott wor willing to part wi' her for fifty-five, there wud be fifteen pun gwaying begging for they that warked the bargain; and mind you, it could be warked honest: I ain't no friend to thieving."

Dan made no answer. His readiness of speech and his new fund of courage had alike deserted him. The hostler appeared to interpret the silence as assent.

"Yes," he continued, "as you say, us could wark it honest."

"I ain't never said no such wud," Dan stuttered, feebly.

"Wuds! What be wuds?" exclaimed the

hostler, spitting out the straw. "Nater be what I reckons on."

Silas spoke with sudden masterfulness, and Dan was silent; the cur in him dropping stern at the crack of the whip.

"Why, your own skin be more vally to 'ee than your sweetheart's good name; but, law, there—I ain't for denying you be an honest lad; and mark you, I don't wish 'ee otherwise. Naw, naw, things be a deal safer left honest."

Again Dan cringed visibly. "What do you want me to be after doing?" he asked.

"Do?" said the hostler, "why, bide in the future the same as you've bin in the past and you'll do fast anuff." He broke into a short high-pitched laugh, and then, becoming suddenly serious, walked to the mare and picked up one of her feet. "You'll find o' whiles her goes a bit tender," he ended, authoritatively.

Dan's pride in and love of the mare flamed up.

"I couldn't lie on her," he said. "Her ain't never gone tender in her life."

For answer the hostler took off his cap

and, withdrawing a letter from the lining, held it out to Dan.

"Maybe you knaws the look o' this?"

"Why, that be Phoebe Hazeldene's letter to me!" Dan exclaimed, making a quick motion forward, as if he would snatch it from him; but the hostler withdrew the letter, replacing it in the lining of his cap.

"So you own to taking they fifteen pun off the maid?" he said, smiling grimly.

"I ain't never owned to nothing."

"Save to baing honest."

Dan turned to him with sudden anger: "Don't bait me too far," he exclaimed.

"Baiting 'ee! I ain't baiting 'ee. Why, I ain't never said no wud o' this letter to any-one azide yerself. I've acted friendzome from the fust."

"Give me the letter back."

"Naw, naw, I reckon not."

"S'posin' I take it? What's to prevent me?"

The pupils of Silas Trustgore's deep-set eyes vibrated as if illuminated from within, and his ill-built figure strung itself to sudden tenseness.

"You ain't made that way," he replied.
"'Tis thic prevents 'ee."

Dan's spurious courage flickered a moment and then died down. He made a hasty step towards the mare, swung himself into the stirrups, and rode out of the yard. Silas watched his retreating figure in silence, and when at length he withdrew his eyes, they lit on a rosebud that had fallen from Dan's coat into a little dirty pool. Advancing to the spot, he picked up the flower, carefully flicking the muddy water from it.

"If there be wan thing more than another I can't a-bear," he said, "'tis to see a flower trod under foot."

CHAPTER X

MARY ANNE WORT SEEKS COUNSEL FROM THE CAPTAIN

JULY had drawn to a close ; the bent figure of the whortleberry-gatherer was no longer to be seen on the moor ; wide patches of bracken had been cut, and stood heaped up in yellow stacks in the farmyards. A west wind mingled sea scents with the odour of the flowers, and blew softly on the old Captain sitting in a shady corner of his garden. The heat had made him drowsy, and the sound of approaching footsteps fell upon his ear unnoticed. The new-comer, a tall severe-faced woman, advanced up the path, and halting a few paces from his chair, stood undecided whether to disturb him or not, then he opened his eyes and glanced up at her.

“Mary Anne Wort !” he murmured.

"Warm weather for walking this, Miss Wort," he added, rousing himself. "You'll be glad of a drop o' cider, no doubt."

"There iddn't naught to be said against cider taken wi' discarnment," the woman answered, seating herself upright on a garden seat. "The grudge, if any, lies most often at the giver's door," she added later, when Hannah, at the Captain's bidding, brought a jug and two glasses and placed them with unnecessary clatter on a table between him and his guest.

"This liquor iddn't no friend to ill-will," replied the Captain, smiling with satisfaction as the cider rushed gold and glistening from the jug to the glass. "Drink and come again—the oftener the better."

Mary Anne Wort's face softened a little. "Ah, Cap'en," she said, "you wor alles an easy-spoken, easy-actioned man; not," she continued, relapsing back once more into her severe manner, "that I be a friend to such ways, and Life be much o' my opinion, or it wouldn't ha' laid 'ee by the legs as it has."

The Captain made no answer, but having fitted the tips of his fingers together, sat

looking genially across at his guest. Her glass emptied, her eyes had strayed to a row of hives at the farther end of the garden.

"There be a deal o' perversion in a bee," she exclaimed, slowly. "The dance mine ha' led me this year is past the bearing of Christian patience. They swarmed early, 'tis true, but little anuff I gained by the same; fust nothing would plaze 'em but to sag themselves on the public road, then all-ta-wance up they buzzed and flew straight as a line for Martha Stiggin's cottage, and pitched on an apple-tree alongside o' her back-door. 'Twor her that sold me dree hard-roe bloaters for softs; I ain't forgi'ed her for that yet; 'tis an old score, but 'twill take long settling."

She was silent awhile, and her face, that seemed too hard to wrinkle, grew sharp in outline.

"'Twas a long way for you to carry them bees back alone," said the Captain, sympathetically. "Happen you got a man to drive 'em for 'ee?"

"I ain't never got 'em back," replied Mary Anne Wort in a tart voice. "For why? Coz her held to 'em. But there," she added,

somewhat inconsequently, "us shall meet afore the jidgment-seat o' heaven, tho' I doubt if the Almighty will be a fair jidge o' bees or bloaters either, for the matter o' that."

"Well, well," exclaimed the Captain soothingly; "well, well, well. Take another glass o' cider; talking is thirsty work."

"Cider won't gie me my June swarm back again, nor my next year's take o' honey," Mary Anne Wort replied, extending her glass. She swallowed its contents with a curious scraping sound, as if half way down her throat the acidity in the cider met the acidity of her nature with a twang.

"But," she added, after a pause, "'twor other matters that brought me here this day. None other," she continued, glancing fiercely across at her host, "than an offer of marriage!"

The chair in which the Captain was seated recoiled some paces.

"Ah!" he exclaimed slowly.

"None other," she repeated, "than an offer o' marriage; the same being made by Silas Trustgore, hostler over to the Lion."

"Very wisely done on the part o' Silas Trustgore," remarked the Captain, with obvious relief.

"Oh," the woman answered, "ha's been casting sheep's glances at my garden this long while; and then I keep me own pig."

There was a matter-of-factness in the statement that rather took the Captain aback. "And what might your answer ha' been, Miss Wort?" he asked, after a pause.

"Well," she replied, "'twos on thic I comed up here to consult 'ee."

"I bain't much o' a jidge o' such things," said the Captain, "being so to speak unexperienceful."

"Human nater be human nater, married or single," Mary Anne Wort answered, emptying her glass. "Marriage, leastaways fur wuman," she continued, after a pause, "be a circuitous thing: her begins by washing and cooking for two on the Monday, and the chances are when the end of the week comes round her be fo'ced to buy the Sunday dinner out o' her own arnings. Not, mind you, that I go for to deny but that Silas Trust-

gore be a saving man; he's all that and more—you won't catch him washing his face afore he knows what use to put the water to arter. No, no, I ain't got no fault to find wi' him on that tally."

She was silent a moment, and drawing her chair closer to the table, leant forward, peering straight into the Captain's face.

"I take it," she continued, "us be all sinners more or less; wan fails here and t'other there; but when it comes to living wi' an evil-doer for the rest o' your life, you chooses him thoughtful. I reckon, Cap'en, that you be wan wi' me ez to thic?"

A slow humorous smile played about the old man's mouth.

"There seems a deal in what you say," he replied.

"Ay, ay," she answered, "I ain't laid single in bed these seven and forty year wi'out reckoning on sich thing, you may be bound. Not," she added, "that I hold with the allurecaciousness o' man ez man; he may tempt some, but he don't tempt me—still, 'tis human nater to like company; there be a lonesomeness in death that a body would gie

a deal to keep out o' life: die alone I must, but there's a choice ez to living."

She stopped speaking, and putting up her hands, smoothed her thin brown hair back under her bonnet. "I've took Silas Trustgore's fancy," she said, "that is, if you reckons the garden and the pig in."

The Captain seemed at a loss for an answer, but Mary Anne Wort had sunk into reverie, appearing not to notice his lack of comment.

"'Tis a soothing thing," she mused half aloud; "'tis a soothing thing for a woman when her has reached her fifty-seventh year unsought, to find herself fancied."

The Captain cleared his throat: "Affection comes home to us all," he said.

"Ay," replied the woman, her hard face softening, "if it be only from a cat. My Tom died last fall, and my heart hasn't gone out to no other cat since; tho' I've missed him sore about the place."

"Silas Trustgore seems a steady man," exclaimed the Captain, half to himself.

"He iddn't wan that bubbles over into wrongdoing, if you mean that," replied Mary

Anne Wort, sighing unconsciously. "It be round the law he staps, not across it. But there—maybe I wrong him; anyways I've felt kinder towards marriage ever since my cat died sudden."

The Captain looked at her pityingly: "Your cottage be terrible out o' the way o' folks," he said.

"Ay," she answered, "it faces lonesome each way. And when the wind blows o' nights, it makes the human nater inside o' 'ee painful querulous."

The Captain pulled himself upright in his chair.

"Every woman ought to marry," he exclaimed, with emphasis. "Tiddn't right that her shouldn't."

A gleam of happiness lit up Mary Anne Wort's face, as the sun a wintry landscape. "So that be your advice," she said, rising from her seat. "Well, maybe when the fall o' the year comes round, I'll dap back on it."

CHAPTER XI

A CHOICE IN TIES

It was Sunday on the farm and August. Out in the fields the wheat stood stately and golden, awaiting the sickle: the oats and rye had already fallen, and lay in long wavy lines, the breeze blowing across them tuneless. In the meadows the clover stretched up towards a second crop, and beneath the warm red earth the turnip-seed germinated.

Silas Trustgore, mounted on a diminutive grey pony, cantered across the moor; the sheep lifted their heads, stared foolishly after him, and then fell back again to cropping herbage.

The midday meal was over at the farm when Silas, some little time later, entered the Pigotts' yard. Dan, standing near the parlour-window, caught a brief glimpse of him as he rode past, and his eyes strayed instinct-

tively from the hostler's wizen figure to the out-building where the chestnut was stalled.

"I'll be danged if he shall make me play the blackguard!" exclaimed the young fellow; but, backing the valorous attitude by discretion, he beat a hasty retreat to his own room, and shot the bolt behind him. Once there, however, his curiosity as to the hostler's visit became irresistible, and unlocking the door he stole to the head of the stairs. In the parlour below Silas was talking to Farmer Pigott; scraps of their conversation floated up to Dan, and following the course of the discussion he learned that Silas had been sent by his master to ask Farmer Pigott to cut and carry a field of corn. The explanation was reasonable, and Dan's spirits rose: suddenly, however, he caught the sound of his own name in Silas Trustgore's voice, and at the same moment the parlour-door shut with a bang. The hum of voices was still audible, but he could no longer distinguish the words. Fear began to steal through him like a slow stream; he leaned forward, his face white, his lips twitching. "S'posin' he means to ruin me

'coz I ain't lied on the mare," he exclaimed ; and as he spoke the door of the room below opened once more, and he heard steps coming along the passage in his direction. Hurriedly he retreated to his room, turning the key again upon intruders. The steps ascended the stairs, and he recognised Farmer Pigott's heavy tread. Sinking his face in his hands, the young fellow dropped upon the bed.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" he exclaimed hoarsely. "S'posin' he's ruined me—s'posin' he's showed him the letter!"

Opposite him on the wall hung a small glass. Raising his head he saw reflected his own face: it stared at him, an abject image of terror. With a cry of revolt he sprang to his feet.

"I ain't like thic," he protested, "I ain't like thic." Staggering forward he unlocked the door, choosing, rather than face the dread vision, to face his uncle.

Farmer Pigott recoiled a step. "Well, be danged!" he exclaimed; "be 'ee practising for a scarecrow, or what?"

He laid a strong hand on the young fel-

low's shoulder: "Jest look at your face in the glass over agin 'ee on the wall there."

With a quick movement Dan wrenched himself free. "I dursn't," he exclaimed. "I ain't like thic. I ain't like thic."

The farmer's face hardened. "You young gallows-bird," he answered; "that you should be flesh and blood o' mine!" Turning slowly, he left the room; at the head of the stairs he halted for a moment and added, "Silas Trustgore wants to have a few words wi' 'ee, I'll tell un to walk up."

Dan made no answer, but sank upon the bed, and there, a few moments later, the hostler found him. Silas took stealthy stock of the room and its occupant, and Dan, raising his head, asked sullenly, "What do you want wi' me?"

"Want?" repeated the hostler, "why, da-cent speech fust along. You ain't much o' an ornament to the Day o' Rast, you ain't."

"And do 'ee reckon that you be a better one?"

"I ain't no chile to be a weighing and balancing o' sich things," the hostler replied, going to an open drawer. "Law bless us!" he

continued, "what have 'ee got here? ties—and natty wans too, dang me if they iddn't!"

He lifted the ties from the drawer, and after taking off his coat, tried on each in turn before the glass. Dan watched the operation apathetically indignant, but made no comment.

"Now this here scarf wi' the blue spot," Silas continued, refolding the tie with careful precision as he spoke, "be the very moral o' what I want. 'Tis the vitty thing to hearten a man up when he stands wi' his bride afore the altar. Maybe you didn't know I wor thinking on getting married?" he ended.

"No," said Dan, "I held you for too old."

Silas winced. "Old," he repeated. "I ain't old; the grave won't see me this many a year yet. Pah! why should us talk o' sich things; there iddn't no call." He was silent a moment, and regarded himself stealthily in the glass, then his eyes fell on the tie he held in his hand.

"Have 'ee a bit o' paper?" he asked.

"What do 'ee want wi' a bit o' paper?"

"Why, to wrap up the scarf wi', o' course."

"It don't need no paper; put 'un back where you took 'un from."

Silas made no immediate reply; but catching sight of a newspaper on the dressing-table, he tore off a piece, wrapped it round the tie, and placed the parcel in his pocket.

"I shall git married in thic scarf," he said.

Dan jumped to his feet. "Damn your cheek," he burst out—"I bought that tie up to London."

"Ay, I can believe it," Silas answered; "I ain't never seen its like in these parts afore. Law," he continued in a reflective voice, "what call has a man to steal when he can come by all he needs honest?"

"You be a sight wuss than a thief," Dan exclaimed, hotly.

"Na, na," Silas answered. "Na, na. I walks wi'in the law." Then, turning on the young fellow with an abrupt change of voice: "What have 'ee done about thicky mare?" he demanded.

Dan's anger collapsed. "I ain't done nought," he exclaimed, helplessly.

"Then it be high time that you bestirred yourzulf."

"Why should I play the blackguard to please you?"

"Na, na; not to plaze me. I don't ax 'ee to do ut to plaze me—none sich thing—'tis to save yerzulf."

Dan stared with dull wonder at the old man's face, yellow and leathery: it seemed too desiccated to express emotion.

"You be mortal much a devil, Silas Trustgore," he said.

The hostler made no immediate reply.

"'Tworn't me but the Almighty that put evil into the world," he answered, after a pause. "Na doubt His puppus wor a good wan, and it don't become sich ez us to question it. All I does is to tarn the evil to my own ends; but—mark 'ee—I kapes mezulf unspotted."

"Good gore, you unspotted!"

Silas drew nearer and laid a shrivelled hand on the young fellow's shoulder: "Wor it I or the Almighty that made 'ee white-livered?" he asked. "Answer me that."

Dan tried, without effect, to release himself from the hostler's grasp. "Hell 'ull have 'ee anyway," he answered, evasively.

"Na," Silas replied, "I shall draw back in time; but there iddn't no call to draw back. I walks circumspect and wi'in the law. 'Tiddn't like thic wi' 'ee, mind—you wor marked out for destruction from the day that your mother conceived 'ee."

Dan whitened. "Why me more than you?" he gasped.

The hostler released his grip from the young fellow's shoulder. "There be they," he answered, bringing the first two fingers of his right hand down on to the palm of his left, "that have a say in their own lives, and there be they that have none. I belongs to tha fust; you ta tha last. But 'tworn't to argify over sich things as thic that I comed here," he continued, "but to say that I wud give 'ee wan more week afore I up and shows Phoebe Hazeldene's letter tu Farmer Pigott."

"He wud tarn me out if you did! You wouldn't be after ruining me surely?"

"Na," said Silas, moving away, "I gives 'ee a week. A smart lad the like o' you could cheapen a 'oss a good fifteen pun in a week."

Going out, he closed the door.

CHAPTER XII

UNDER THE TALL ELM

DAN sat and listened to Silas Trustgore's retreating steps; he heard him cross the yard below, unhitch his cob, and ride slowly away. Then, rising, Dan left his room, and going to the stable entered the mare's loose-box. He slipped off his jacket and waistcoat, rolled up his shirt-sleeves, and dandy-brush in hand, began rubbing the chestnut down. He worked mechanically, the pain in his mind seeming to ebb and flow with the movement, while the mare, keenly appreciative, switched her tail across her hams as if in search of some recusant fly. Suddenly, dropping the dandy-brush, and pressing his face against the chestnut's wither, the young fellow burst into tears. It was at this moment that Farmer Pigott entered the stable and, unperceived by Dan, stood watching the

scene. It stirred him to quick pity and made him regret a past harshness that he still felt had been justifiable.

"What's up wi' 'ee, lad?" he asked.

Dan started, and hardly knowing what he said, answered: "I cannot bring mezulf to speak bad o' the mare—and yet I know I must in the end. I sorter know I must in the end."

"Why, what ails her?" exclaimed the farmer, casting a rapid scrutinising glance over the chestnut. "Her zims fit enough."

Dan surveyed the mare drearily. "No decent man could pick a hole in her."

"Has her gi'ed herzulf a bit o' a strain and you be a-feared to tell o' it? You ain't got no cause to fear speaking out. I'd trust 'ee wi' an animal anywhere."

"Naw, 'tiddn't that," the young fellow answered, turning away.

"Wull, what be it, then? Do 'ee reckon her iddn't sound?"

Dan was silent; stooping, he picked up his jacket, and as he raised his head the mare turned her beautiful luminous eyes full on him. For a moment the man and

animal seemed to plead with one another, and then Dan succumbed. "I can't go back on her," he burst out. "Her that has acted faithful from the first," and pushing open the door of the loose-box, he left the stable.

"Well, dang me if 'tiddn't a queer start anyway," exclaimed the farmer. "Whatever can be up wi' the mare," he added, running his hand along her back and down her legs. He lifted up her feet, feeling the temperature of the hoof inside. "Cool as a dawg's muzzle," he muttered; "her ain't set up the founder anyway."

Slipping a halter over the animal's head, he led her outside. He called to Abel Finch, who was standing near, and ordered him to trot the mare up and down. A careless fate playing with the mare's reputation allowed her to stumble badly.

"Her 'ull gie herzulf the *Devonshire coat o' arms*¹ wan o' these days if her goes on like thic," exclaimed the cow-hind.

Farmer Pigott's face darkened. "Take her back to her box," he answered curtly.

¹ A pair of broken knees.

"That be what the lad wor worrying over, no doubt," he added to himself. "Dan wor terrible took up wi' the mare from the fust. Wull, the sooner I parts wi' her the better;" and still thinking of the subject, he entered the house.

When Dan left the stable he had gone straight to the moor: the wide stretch of sky above, the wide stretch of heather beneath, and the wholesome wind, had soothed him many a time. To-day, however, they had lost their power of healing. About four miles from the farm the moor dipped sudden and deeply, forming a valley the sides of which were lined with trees. Dan followed the course of a stream which rubbed its way over the pebbles and tree-roots, clear, limpid, and golden as honey. The walk had been a favourite one with Phoebe and himself: in the days of childhood they had trotted along it hand in hand, and there as lad and maid they had learned of the strange new love that had sprung up fresh and tender between them. The stream took an abrupt bend, elbow-wise, round a tall elm. At the foot of the tree he saw

Phoebe. His steps were inaudible on the mossy grass, and she did not perceive his approach; her head was bent, the body drooped forward as some tired flower, and his own heart did not seem more forlorn than her face and figure. There came to him a sudden, living need of her; in silence he drew nearer, in silence their eyes met, and in silence love healed them of many things. Kneeling beside her, Dan raised her hands and placed them on his eyes.

"I've been hungering for 'ee, dear heart," he said. She drew his face down till it rested on her breast. A sob rose in her throat, but she answered nothing. Her heart had hungered for him also.

"Phoebe! Phoebe!" he burst out, "do 'ee reckon that some folk be damned right away from the fust? that they ain't got no chance the same as the rest? be 'em ever so wishful to go straight, they 'ull always end by going crooked?"

In a flash she divined his trouble. "No, no," she answered, pressing him closer to her, "there be thic that be alles stronger than natur, and that be Love."

He raised a despairing face to hers. "I love 'ee, Phœbe; I love 'ee, Phœbe, but I ain't never won droo yit."

"Us have got our whole lives to conquer in," she answered—"years and years and years." Strength seemed to radiate from her as she spoke. But he was in the grip of despair: "I shall never win droo," he said. "You'll see, I shall never win droo."

She made no reply, but leaned her face against his, and her tears fell healingly upon his desolation. After a while words came to him; he told her the story of his shame, concealing nothing: and when she heard all, and realised yet again how deep had been the injury she had done him, there rose up in her a hatred of that which is crooked and evil.

"Oh, Dan!" she exclaimed, "us have had enough o' sich things; let us deal fair wi' folk."

He broke into a bitter laugh: "That be just like 'ee to reckon things can be altered all o' a minute," he said. "Do 'ee want me to be ruined?"

But she saw only his moral overthrow.

"Dan, Dan," she pleaded, "don't let me be the cause o' yer ruin. I acted wrongful; be a fine lad in spite o' it."

"Ay," he said, "a fine lad! What would you have me do?"

"Up and speak the truth."

"Up and speak the truth?"

"Ess."

"And lose the farm?"

Her eyes followed the course of the stream, but they were filled with a vision of a glorified Dan. Her face glowed, a passion of well-doing was upon her.

"The truth be more vally than any varm," she exclaimed. He stared at her in dumfounded bewilderment. That truth, as Truth, had an abstract value was beyond his grasp.

"You must be mazed," he said.

She looked at him pityingly, but she did not understand how hard was the task she wished to impose on him.

"I bain't mazed, Dan," she answered. "I see there iddn't no other way out for 'ee; 'tiddn't no—but that."

"You wud ha' me tell uncle and be tarned

away for my pains. You wud ha' me lose the farm. Happen you don't know," he continued with rising indignation, "all that the farm means to me? Why, I've loved it iver since I was a little snip o' a chile, and I couldn't bear to be tarned away from it for good and all; it wud be jest more than I could bear."

For a moment she saw the dreariness of the prospect with his eyes. "Oh, lad, lad," she said, "if on'y I had niver stole thic money! I killed mother, and I've ruined thee."

"Ay," he answered, "it wud ha' been better if you had let me die over to furren parts; most like, too, I shouldn't ha' died. What iver made 'ee go for to do ut?"

"It came to me that you wud die, and us shud niver see each other no more," she answered.

The consequences of her past act pressed too hardly upon him at that moment to allow of him being touched. "You niver said the money was stole. You niver gave me no chance," he said.

"No," she answered, "I niver gave 'ee no chance."

"And you must ha' knowed that you wor acting wrongful."

"Yes, I knawed it," she admitted, "on'y nought zeemed to matter if on'y you didn't die." She was silent a moment. "And I feels just like thic now, Dan," she continued. "I wants 'ee to act truthful, and nought, not even the varm, zims to matter alongside o' ut."

"Oh, you be a regular woman!" he burst out bitterly. "Fust you tarns thief, and now you wants me to tarn saint; but there—I jest ain't going to tarn saint to plaze 'ee."

She made no answer, and his anger began to cool.

"Oh, Phœbe," he said, "what makes 'ee so terrible unseeing?"

The penitent tears trickled down her face, but she found no words to reply to his indictment. He drew nearer and took her hands in his. "I know I've acted bad me-zulf," he said, "but you ain't helpt to mend matters by your advice, have 'ee, dear heart?" he continued, almost playfully. "Can't 'ee find no other way out o' ut?"

She hid her face against his coat. "Lad,

what can I zay to 'ee?" she exclaimed in a broken voice, "'cept that wan way be right and wan be wrong."

Then he left her, and went on his way angry and disconsolate.

"Lad, lad," she cried, running after him with extended hands.

But he would not heed, even though he heard her.

CHAPTER XIII

SILAS TRUSTGORE'S GIFT

THE firelight streamed across the threshold of Mary Anne Wort's cottage, and flickered against the diamond-paned windows. The table in the kitchen was laid for supper, and on the hob the kettle, approaching boiling point, spurted fitfully. Miss Wort lit the lamp, and as she did so a knock sounded at the door and Silas entered. He was carrying a parcel of somewhat curious shape, which he placed, together with his cap, on a side-table.

"I thought I would jest drap in, it baing Saturday night," he said.

"I put an extry plate for 'ee," she answered, without turning round.

He went to the window and picked the dead leaves off some geraniums that grew there. "The plants be a bit dry," he re-

marked. "Shall I fetch a drap o' water for 'em from the butt?"

"Ay, do," she said; "and I'll dish up the while."

They ate the meal in silence, but afterwards, when the supper things had been cleared away, Mary Anne Wort drew her chair up in front of the fire and invited Silas to do the same. Before complying, however, he fetched the odd-shaped parcel from the side-table.

"I've brought 'ee sommat," he said. "The nights wull be gitting longer soon, and I thought maybe 'twud be company like."

An expression of pleased interest crossed Mary Anne Wort's face. "Wait a bit till I find my glasses," she answered.

"Time enough, time enough," replied the hostler, slowly untying the parcel. "There now!" he exclaimed, as he removed the last wrapper: "What do 'ee think o' that?"

"Law bless us!" cried Mary Anne, in a voice of mingled astonishment and delight—"if 'tiddn't my old Tom—and looking the very moral o' hiszulf too. Whativer do it mean?"

Silas smiled, his lips, hard as drawn wire,

lengthening leanly. "I dug 'un up and stuffed 'un," he answered. "Happen you minds he died about the time I fust comed courting. I said to mezulf 'If Mary Anne Wort promises me her hand, I'll stuff thic cat and gie it her for a wedding present!' I brought it 'ee a bit sooner cuz you seems lonzome here all by yurzulf."

"Ay, I be lonesome," she admitted. "Law," she continued, leaning forward and stroking her dead favourite—"how prosperous he do look, to be sure, sitting there on that bit o' red cloth."

Silas's face softened with satisfaction. "I put a squeak in un. You 'ave on'y got to pinch his tail, and he'll cry the same as any living thing: it warks zo," he explained, pinching the cat between his finger and thumb.

"Well I niver, only hark to that!" cried Mary Anne Wort, as her stuffed favourite produced a spirited 'miaow.' 'Tis his very tone and voice."

"Ay," commented Silas, "the cat be there but the milk remains in the jug." He was silent a moment, and raising his eyes, glanced round the kitchen.

"'Tis a tidy little place you've got here," he remarked, in a pleased voice. "Us 'ull settle down comfortable wi' wat us 'ave laid by and wat us makes out o' vules and sich."

At this moment there was a knock at the door and Dan entered. A curious half-mocking smile flitted for a moment across the hostler's face as his eyes fell upon the young fellow.

"They told me over at the inn I shud find you here," Dan explained.

"Ba 'ee after having a few wuds wi' me then?" answered the hostler, rising.

"Ess," said Dan; and the two men left the cottage together. They passed down the narrow path to the road beyond, which was divided from the garden by a high privet hedge.

"Ah," exclaimed Mary Anne Wort, slowly, "that lad be wan o' the vules no doubt! I should dearly like to knaw what Silas be after wi' he." She stood for a moment irresolute, glancing first at the open door and then at her stuffed favourite.

"It do zim a bit unfrienzdome spying on him after he acted that thoughtful, stuffing

my Tom. Still," she added, "a lone woman must needs zee to things herzulf."

So saying she stole softly to the door and peered out. There was no moon—everything lay shrouded in shadow. A low murmur of voices echoed across to her.

"I'll ruckee down longside thic hedge," she exclaimed, slipping into the garden. "This bain't the time to be pernicketting in choice o' acts."

Her dress caught on a rose-bush; she detached it with trembling fingers.

Silas peered across the gate.

"Be that you, Mary Anne?" he called.

She stood still, making no answer.

"'Tiddn't nought but some bird," said Dan impatiently. "Look 'ee," he continued, "you reckons to make fifteen pun by the mare—why won't you wait? I cud work and pay the money honest, if you wud wait."

"Na, na, I wor niver wan o' yer dawdlers," Silas answered. "When a man needs a shillun to-day, 'tiddn't much good promising him a pun next year."

"Gie me back the letter, and I will work for 'ee honest," Dan pleaded.

"And 'tis honest wark I'm axing o' 'ee," Silas answered. "Ain't I told 'ee all along it cud be warked honest?"

Dan stamped his foot. "That be nought but wan o' yer lies," he said, angrily. "Why shud you want to ruin me? I ain't niver done you no harm."

"Ruin 'ee? I don't want to ruin 'ee," Silas answered. "I uses 'ee for my own puppusses, that's wat I does; and if you valls to pieces in my hands that be your Maker's fault, not mine. Na, na; there iddn't no wan outside a man's zulf that can bring him to ruin, lest 'tis his Maker."

"I can't argy wi' 'ee," said Dan, in a hopeless voice. "But I jest ax 'ee, standing here as man to man, to gie me this wan chance."

There was a long pause, and Silas drew nearer and laid his hand on the young fellow's arm. "You'll reckon most like that I be a heartless devil when I answers 'ee Nay," he said; "but na, lad, 'tiddn't thic: 'tis cuz I see 'twud but be gieing 'ee a longer rope to hang yerzulf by. You ain't got the grit, you ain't got the spunk, to pull up in time. If I stands azide, there'll be they who won't

stand azide; and why shud I lose my profit if hell 'ull 'ave 'ee any way?"

"I bain't as bad as all thic," exclaimed Dan, hoarsely. "I knaw I ain't as bad as all thic; there be zome good in me. I swear it!"

Silas looked down on the lad's face, white against the dusky evening shadows. "Ay," he said, "there be good in 'ee, and you be the rottener becuz o' ut. Belave me, there iddn't no more worthless skiddik in nater than thic that ba too rotten for dacent use, and too good to be drawn out on the dung-heap. Na, na; upright livin' iddn't for sich as you, and if 'ee take my advice, you'll gie up worritting arter it."

"Curse you!" Dan burst out in helpless impotence, "curse you!"

"Ay, cuss away, and much good may it do 'ee."

"Oh, you be a heartless devil!"

"Zims zo to 'ee, naw doubt," said Silas, turning from him and pushing back the gate. "Wull, good night, I must ba on the move."

There was no answer—Dan had rushed away into the darkness. The old man sighed,

and began slowly to retrace his steps. As he neared the rose-tree the tall form of Mary Anne Wort confronted him.

"Ba that 'ee, Mary Anne Wort?" he exclaimed, starting back.

"Ay."

"You heard what us zed?"

"Ivery wud. Come inzide."

They went inside and closed the door; their hard immobile faces had turned from rusty yellow to greyish white, but the lips, close-set, showed no sign of tremulousness. The woman spoke first; her voice, though dry, was firm and even.

"Us must part from this night," she said.

"Ez yer wull."

"I wud ha' made 'ee a good wife."

"I knaws it."

She put her puckered big-boned hand on his shoulder. "Silas," she said, solemnly, "s'posin' this lad testifies agin 'ee on the day o' Jidgment?"

"I ain't got no fear o' sich trash ez he."

"Happen he's trash in our eyes, but who shall say if he be zo in the Almighty's?" she answered. "Oh, Silas," she continued,

and her voice for the first time betrayed emotion, "I couldn't bear to see 'ee cast away when it comed to the last!"

"I walks circumspect," he answered; but he spoke without his usual glibness.

"That may save 'ee wi' man, but I fear sore it 'ull no save 'ee wi' God," she replied, turning from him with what sounded like a rough sob. He took up his cap and opened the door, halting a moment, his hand on the latch. "You be a good woman, Mary Anne Wort," he said; "I reckon, ez things go nowadays, us cud ha' made wan-nother comfortable." And he went out and left her.

She listened to his retreating steps in silence, and then her eyes fell on the stuffed cat. Sinking down on a chair, she covered her face with her hands, and between her red fingers the sparse tears of middle-age trickled slowly.

"Oh, Silas, Silas," she exclaimed, "what a varrigated thing human nater be!"

CHAPTER XIV

SUNDAY AT THE FARM

THE next day being Sunday, Farmer Pigott, accompanied by his wife and Dan, walked across the fields to the church, a grey, battered building, the stone tower of which had long since tumbled down and been replaced in its turn by a wooden construction, roughly tarred, and somewhat out of the perpendicular. There was no vestry, and the clergyman, "Old Parson Jack," put on his surplice in full view of the congregation. He was a tall, well-built man, afflicted with a stutter and a loose set of false teeth : the latter having a trick of shooting from their bearings during the service, he was obliged, in order to re-adjust them, to turn to the east, in which position he formed an object of admiration to a row of small children sitting on the altar-steps.

The pews were high-backed; that of the Hall being roomier than the others, and heading the aisle on the left. Farther down on the same side was the Pigotts' pew, so that when, from time to time during the service, the congregation stood up, the Squire's broad back and portly figure presented itself to the old farmer's view, invariably causing the latter to murmur—"I reckon arter all I'll sell him thic mare."

Service over, the congregation remained standing till after the Squire had left the church, and then filed out after him,—Pigott tripping over his wife's gown in his desire to avoid unnecessary delay. The Squire was just about to enter his carriage as the farmer passed through the lych-gate.

"Well, Pigott," he said, catching sight of him, "have you parted with that chestnut of yours yet?"

"Her's still in the market, sir, if you're wishful of changing your mind," replied the farmer, beaming.

"No, no; not now, thank 'ee," said the Squire, stepping into his carriage. "I bought a capital animal off Sir John last week;

bright bay with black points. You must come up and have a look at him one of these days; same size as your chestnut."

Farmer Pigott's face fell: he had relied on the Squire to buy the mare in the event of a better market failing him.

"Sorry to hear that, sir," he answered; "I should ha' liked you to have had the chestnut."

The Squire laughed merrily. "You must find some one with a longer pocket than mine," he said, and touching his hat in response to Pigott's salute, he motioned to the coachman to drive on.

"Ay, you be waiting for higher prices, na doubt," chimed in Silas Trustgore, who, unperceived, had been listening to the conversation.

Pigott glanced at him with subdued irritation. "To want is wan thing, to git is another," he answered.

"Oh, her's a vine animal, there iddn't no doubt," replied the hostler, "though maybe," he continued, shaking his head depreciatingly, "you can't depend on a mare the same ez you can a 'oss, they be queer tem-

pered and inclined to knock theirzelves about."

Dan, who had been listening to the conversation with a lowered brow, interposed sharply: "There iddn't a better-tempered beast living than the chestnut."

A moment's silence ensued. Silas, raising his eyes, let them rest on the young fellow's face, while a slow smile crept across his own. "You knaw you ain't got the zame opinion o' the mare ez 'ee had," he said. "Why, 'tworn't more than this day a week back that you let on that her went tender o' times. You can't go for to deny ut, cuz you axed me if I reckoned her feet wor vitty."

The farmer stopped short in the middle of the lane. "I ain't never heard no mention o' thic," he exclaimed.

"'Tis all danged——" began Dan, and then stopped short, his eyes fixed on a letter in Silas's hand.

"La," interposed Mrs. Pigott in a placid voice, "the lad and the mare ha' been friends from the first; 'tiddn't no good trying to get him to testify against her."

"Ay, natural anuff, natural anuff," re-

plied the hostler; "the mare be a vine critter. I knaw a man thet be looking for her very moral, but then he couldn't rise to the price."

"Who be he, then?" exclaimed the farmer.

"Oh, 'tiddn't no good talking o' un, he couldn't rise to the price; he ain't niver gie'd more than saxty for a 'oss in his life, I'll swear," the hostler replied, indifferently. "Not," he continued, "that I hold 'ee for altogether wise to say 'nay' to the Squire's offer—saxty guineas be saxty guineas, and a deal safer tied up in yer pocket than vested in a 'oss."

"Oh, the mare's sound enough," replied the farmer, testily. "Who's the man you wor speaking of? Be that a letter from he that you've got in your hand there?"

"Na, na; 'tiddn't from he," Silas answered, replacing the letter in his pocket. "I shall see un next Vriday, moastlike," he added, after a pause. "I be gwaying inter Extur market."

The farmer made no reply, but dropped behind with his nephew. Mrs. Pigott entered into conversation with Silas, who, however, did not fail to keep an attentive ear

open for all that fell from the two men in the rear. Dan was aware that the hostler was listening, and the knowledge filled him with suppressed rage.

"What be that about the mare's feet?" asked the farmer. "Has her got corns?"

"No; her ain't got corns," replied Dan, sullenly.

"You ain't niver said nought about her going tender afore."

"No."

"Well, dang it, what's up wi' her?"

"I don't know. Her zims sound enough."

"Odds drat it!" the farmer burst out impatiently, "what ails her then?"

Dan made no answer: that Silas should not only predict but be a witness of his shame, was very bitter to him; pride and anger alike urged him to speak the truth. They had reached the entrance-gate of the farm, and Mrs. Pigott's voice broke placidly in upon the silence.

"Ay," she exclaimed, letting her eyes rest on the broad sweep of fields, "'tis a pleasant-faced land this, and lies kind to Nater."

"'Twull all come to your nevvv yome day, I s'pose?" said Silas.

"When my husband dies it will come to the lad sure enough," she answered, passing through the gate.

As the question and answer fell on Dan's ears, he realised afresh all that disinheritance would mean to him. Halting a moment, he looked across the farm lands on which the sunlight lay like fine gold pollen.

"Look 'ee here," exclaimed the farmer, impatiently, "I axed a plain question, and I wud thank 'ee for a plain answer."

"Sell her," said Dan; "you've alles wanted to."

The farmer's temper began to rise.

"I'll bottom what you have got agin her fust," he replied. "If 'tworn't that I can trust 'ee saddle-back sooner than most folk, I shud hold you had done the mare a mischief."

Dan smiled. "Ay, I reckon you can trust me saddle-back," he said with dreary pride.

"Well, you be keeping sommat vrom me," replied his uncle. "Good Gosh, lad," he con-

tinued, his anger spurting over, "speak out—be a man for wance."

But the thought of confession terrified Dan.

"'Tiddn't that; 'tiddn't that," he protested hurriedly; "on'y 'tis hard to ha' to speak agin an animal that one has set a store by."

The answer had a ring of sincerity about it that did not fail to appeal to the farmer. He laid his hand upon the young fellow's shoulder. "So 'tis," he said, "so 'tis. The mare got on the soft side o' ee from the fust, didn't her? Arter all, saxty guineas bain't a bad price. Be it, Trustgore?" he added, turning to the hostler, who made his appearance at this moment from behind a belt of trees.

"Na, 'tiddn't to be despised, if it be the mare you're talking of," replied Silas. "Happen, too," he added, "her wull fetch a pound or two more."

The old farmer gave one of his rare smiles. "Well, if her does," he replied, "the lad shall kape the money for hiszulf. There, Dan, what do 'ee say to that?"

The young fellow made no reply: his uncle's kindness made his own deception doubly hateful to him, and all that was good in his nature rose up in rebellion against the part he was playing. Standing there, seeking for words he had not the courage to utter when found, he looked the cur that in his own thoughts he felt himself to be. Pigott watched him for a moment, and then, with a half sigh, turned and walked away in the direction of the house. "A man can't have flesh and kin belonging to him wi'out paying for it," he exclaimed bitterly.

Left together, Silas drew closer to Dan: "Didn't I tull 'ee it could be warked honest?" he whispered.

.

The following Friday Dan sold the mare in Exeter for seventy guineas. When the transaction was concluded, and he sat alone with Silas in the parlour of a neighbouring inn, he counted out ten guineas and pushed them across the table to the hostler. "There," he exclaimed, "take that, and may I never set eyes on 'ee again!"

Silas counted the money, piece by piece, and put it into a small leather bag. "Twor fifteen pun I reckoned to make," he said, "and this be only ten."

Dan's face whitened. "Ain't 'ee done wi' me yet?" he exclaimed.

The hostler looked at him a moment in silence, and there sprang up in his heart a sudden hatred of this lad that he had injured. Leaning forward, he caught Dan by the button of his coat. "Na, na," he said; "I shall come again zome day for thickey five pun."

CHAPTER XV

CAPTAIN BRATTLE LEAVES PHOEBE TO HER OWN DEVICES

WHEN September came, and cool, damp, autumn scents lay upon everything, Captain Brattle died suddenly from rupture of a blood-vessel on the brain. He was seated in his favourite corner of the terrace facing the bay. The tide was on the ebb, but the sea close to the cliffs' edge almost slept: farther out a faint breeze blew off shore, filling the sails of a small sloop. From time to time the Captain raised his glass and watched her, the build of the boat reminding him of the Saucy Kate.

"'Tis fair enough sailing when you gets away from the lee of the land," he exclaimed, and as he spoke his fingers relaxed their grip upon the telescope, and his spirit drifted out with the tide. The rattle of the

glass on the stone terrace startled Haunah, and she came out, her hands covered with flour, to learn the cause of the disturbance. The Captain's head had fallen forward on his chest, and for a moment she thought he was asleep. Wiping the flour from her hands, she picked up the telescope; but as she replaced it on the table she saw that her master was not asleep, but dead.

The news spread rapidly, reaching Sarah Emmet, the hump-backed layer-out; and taking her best bonnet from its box, she sat and awaited the messenger who was to summon her to the small cottage on the cliff. But no one came—Hannah had refused to send for her.

"I knaws Sarah Emmet's ways, and I knaws the Cap'en's," she explained to Phœbe: "they be powerful independent, both of 'em. Her wud be turning him up and twisting him round jest as she would a baby, and if there was one thing more than another he couldn't abide in a woman 'twas flummux. He must have a clean shirt on his limbs and soap and water passed over him, no doubt, but it shall be done servacious and by your

leave. No, no ; Sarah Emmet shan't lay a hand to him ; 'twud be a poor thing to put him in the earth feeling quarrelsome, though 'tis my opinion that dead or alive he wud be a match for her, he's thic inventive."

When Hannah had finished her task, and the blind in the small bedroom had been drawn, so that the light shone dimly on the Captain's grey, peaceful face, Phœbe brought flowers and laid them between his hands. Kneeling beside the bed, she looked lingeringly at the face that had always turned so kindly a gaze upon her. One by one the tears gathered and dropped: "Oh, you have been good to me—good to me," she sobbed.

In the kitchen below Hannah was talking to her mother, a small, shrivelled woman verging on eighty, who, in spite of her advanced years, had walked up from the village, a distance of three miles.

"I miss him sore," Hannah was saying; "the house be terrible lonely, and I can't abear to look upon his chair; though there was times when he teetotummed round past Christian patience."

"Ay, ay," commented the old woman,

"there bain't nothing one misses more when 'tis passed from 'ee than a worry. There wor your poor father, now: he never cud lie quiet o' nights—a slow man by day, but, law, there worn't his like for zleeping active. Night arter night I wor forced to git up and rummage round for the clothes. Then death fetched him, and I cud lie as warm as other folk; but I never took to the warmth friendzome."

Her daughter made no reply, and after a pause the old woman continued: "The Cap'en wor a good man—he acted well by you, and you acted well by him; but you can't stay on here arter he's gone: I can't have 'ee serving no thief."

Hannah started. "I was trying to reckon that out," she said.

"'Tiddn't a question that needs reckoning on," replied her mother. "Us have walked honest all our days, and niver took nothing from they that didn't."

"Her was young when her fell."

"Young!" repeated the old woman, sharply; "her wor seventeen; and if a maid iddn't to knaw the difference betwix your rightful

and her rightful by then—well, all I can say, 'tis a poor thing for them that owns the skid-dicks."

"Many's the time I've wondered what brought her to do it," replied Hannah, opening and trying the heat of the oven with her hand. "The deed don't seem to fit close to her nohow."

The old woman untied the strings of her bonnet. "Sin be a queer thing—it takes more than eddication to fathom it," she exclaimed; "but us all know that when the Jidgment Day comes, the sheep will be put 'pon wan side and the goats 'pon t'other, and it behoves us to walk careful according: bezides," she continued, "there's the 'pinion o' the vullage to be thought on."

"Vules cud be bought by the score, but you don't buy 'em," replied Hannah, tossing her head; "I niver take no 'count o' the 'pinion o' the vullage."

"You alles spoke lightzome o' sich things," her mother answered; "but there be the time when the vule stumbles on the truth unbeknowns to hiszulf."

Hannah jangled the saucepans together,

paying no heed to the old woman's criticism.

"You reckons, then, I shud leave here?" she asked curtly.

"Ay, arter the funeral: the corpse be master till then. Let her fend for herself: besides, they do say as how the Cap'en has left her the cottage and his bit o' money."

"Yes; he's done that. Lawyer Rickard was here last night."

"Well, then, her can git plenty o' folks for the paying."

"Happen her can."

"Law, yes," replied the old woman, rising and retying her bonnet; "there bain't many steps 'twix the rich man's door and the unprideful. Thank the Lord, us don't belong to sich as they. But there," she ended, going to the door, "I must be on the move; there be some onions I've wanted to store these three days past. I shall ax Dave Turps to fetch your box down on his barrer; 'twill ride 'pon top easy enough." So saying, she hobbled away, leaving her daughter to her own reflections.

As the sound of the retreating footsteps

ceased, Hannah rose, walked upstairs, and opened the door of the Captain's room. Theoretically she agreed with all that her mother had said; and yet she felt reluctant to act in accordance with her advice.

Phoebe was seated by the bed, her arm leaning on the pillow,—there was an unconscious grace in all that she did which, in some subtle way, seemed typical of, and to proceed from, an inner grace of nature. It was this that the elder woman found so puzzling.

Phoebe raised her eyes, and, looking into them, Hannah felt that she was in the presence of a beautiful spirit. She turned away almost fiercely. "How can a thief look like thic?" she asked herself.

The girl leant over the dead man and smoothed out a crease in the sheet. "There zims a deal o' peace about him," she exclaimed softly.

"He's taking his rest now," replied Hannah. "There be one or two things I wanted to talk over with 'ee," she continued after a pause, still keeping her face averted.

"Ess?"

"Mother was saying as how I had better bide long o' her arter the funeral."

"Not come back to the cottage agin?" asked the girl in a startled voice.

"No; Dave Turps cud bring my box down in his barrow."

Phoebe made no reply, and after a while Hannah turned and looked at her. The sunlight had crept through a crack in the blind, across the bed, throwing the lower parts of the girl's face into strong relief, and Hannah noticed that even in grief the flexible soft lips curved tremulously upwards.

The silence, which became unbearable, was broken by Phoebe.

"Be it becuz I'm a thief?" she asked. There was no trace of anger in her voice, the tones were low and even: at that moment she recognised Hannah's right to condemn her more clearly than Hannah did herself. In the pause that ensued the girl's eyes fell on the dead man, who lay as forgetful of her past misconduct as he was unconscious of its present punishment. His indifference, so unlike all that she had hitherto

associated with his nature, struck her as cruelly unnatural. Sinking on her knees beside the bed, she took his cold hand in hers.

While she still knelt there, Hannah left the room.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PEDLAR'S ADVICE TO LIARS

THE funeral over, Hannah and Phoebe returned together to the cottage. Some short time later Dave Turps arrived with his barrow, and the two women watched him place the luggage on it. Though for the last few days their thoughts had been full of each other, they had found little to say, and now when the moment for parting came, each feared to break the silence. Turps having spat on his hands in signification that he was ready to start, Hannah turned to the girl.

"You'll find a tin loaf and a pie ready for to-morrow's baking on the dresser," she said, in a hard matter-of-fact voice.

The tears began slowly to brim in Phoebe's eyes. "'Twor good o' 'ee to mind it," she answered.

Hannah glanced at her with a curious fierce shamefacedness. "Jane Barlow 'ud sleep in the house any time if you shud feel lonesome," she said.

"Naw, naw; I'd a deal liefer bide by myself," Phœbe replied, and turning quickly, she disappeared into the house.

The elder woman followed the retreating figure with her eyes, and when the closing door hid it from view, she motioned to Turps that she was ready to start. He picked up the barrow, and she, her tall figure held very erect, and her stern lips set hard, followed him behind in silence.

Night crept across the moor, shrouding the cottage in shadow; but the blinds remained undrawn, the lamps unlit. There is a loneliness hard to express in words, in which the spirit seems to become flesh and suffer the pangs of the flesh, and the flesh to become spirit and take upon it the spirit's desolation: Phœbe, seated solitary while without night gathered on the moor, tasted such loneliness. At first her brain was numb to thought; but after a while a dread pressed through it lest some day Dan also

might be called upon to suffer as she now was suffering.

She stretched out appealing hands in the darkness.

"Oh, lad, don't 'ee do wrong the zame as I did—don't 'ee do wrong the zame as I did."

The hours crept on: through the open window floated the heavy autumn dews, but the girl did not shiver, and while morning still lay concealed behind the east, she rose, unlatched the door, and passed out. Clouds of mist pressed up from the sea, and high overhead the moon shone upon a grey world. Silence lay on everything, and with it a sense of latent sound. The girl followed the course of the cliffs to a spot where the sea had wormed its way through the rocks' face and formed a blow-hole, up which the incoming tide rushed with a great swaggering bluster. Numberless rabbits nibbling the short grass scuttled away at her approach, leaving tracks on the dew-laden turf, and a man who had been watching them rose and confronted her.

As they stared at each other in the dim

light the girl recognised the face of Ben, the pedlar: they had not met since the day she had been dismissed from the farm. Instinctively their thoughts recurred to that scene, and his words seemed once more to ring in her ears, "Things 'ull better theirzelves."

Ben had heard from the villagers of Captain Brattle's death and Hannah's subsequent departure, and his heart went out in pity to the desolate little figure standing there before him in the greyness.

"Oh, things ain't come right," she exclaimed, unconscious that she uttered the words aloud—"things ain't come right."

He took off his coat and wrapped it round her. "Life zims main hard at times," he said. As he spoke the east mellowed with approaching dawn. "Zee," he continued, "cockleert be on the creep." Spreading his mackintosh on the ground, and placing his pack near it for her to rest against, he persuaded her to sit down. "There!" he exclaimed soothingly, "let us bide and watch a bit. Nater is wonderful speachful when her unwinds the dimmet; and a man feels nearer the core o' things out here than he

does dringed up atween four walls. Ay," he added, speaking more to himself than to her, "'tis here, if anywhere, he can come face to face wi' the Almighty and reason things out, and happen the Lord 'ull zay to him the zame ez He said to Job afore him: 'Come gird up now thy loins like a man, for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me!' They be up-standing ekal-bodied wuds, and have put grit into me many a time. Hark!" he exclaimed, as the sea rushed foaming into the blow-hole, "hark to old Behemoth slinging his tail like a cedar and reckoning he can draw up all Jordan into his mouth. 'Tis a fine fancy that the beast has, and 'tiddn't no bad zip that he takes anyhow."

He talked on, but Phœbe paid no more heed to him than did the stars above his head. The eastern sky turned from grey to white and from white to pale primrose, and along the far hills outline emerged. Light became a living thing, and played upon the earth as upon an instrument, colour awaking with each touch of the strings. A fresh gladness lay on everything, a sense of eternal youth.

The pedlar leaned forward and touched the girl's arm. "Listen!" he said; "the morning stars be singing togither, and the sons o' God shout for joy."

But his words fell on deaf ears. "Oh, Ben," she said, "s'posing things wor cruel hard for they you loved best; s'posing spak-ing the truth meant the losing o' all that wor most dear to 'em, wud 'ee 'ave 'em up and spake it all the zame?"

He looked down a moment into her blue eyes before answering. "Truth iddn't no smooth thing to handle most times," he replied.

"No," she assented eagerly; "and the lad 'ud lose all he had if he spoke out. 'Twud be cruel, cruel to force the truth from him. Oh, do 'ee reckon that punishment wud fall upon the lad for failing this wance?"

A smile, half sad, half pitying, crossed the pedlar's face as he realised that she was speaking of her lover, and that in her desolateness it was of him and not herself that she thought. "Lying," he said, "is a temptacious thing; 'tis always for halting

at the next door but wan, and if you give the skiddick its head there ain't its ekal for leading 'ee into mischief."

"Oh," she cried, wringing her hands, "'tis o' thic that I be afeared. Where shall he stop?"

"There be only wan place to stop short wi' a lie," said the pedlar, "and that be afore 'ee tells it. And if it shud happen, maybe, that you have zipped vrom the truth, wull, drive your heels inter the ground, and hang back wi' all the grit that be in 'ee—it gives 'ee a nasty jar, I'll allow; I knaws that, cuz I've lied mezulf in my time."

Instinctively the girl realised that her lover lacked the courage necessary to save himself in the way the pedlar advised. She sank her face in her hands. "Oh, Ben," she sobbed out, "I've brought ill to them I love—I've brought ill to them I love."

As she sat there in her desolateness, her small bowed figure seemed to resolve itself into a cry for protection, awakening the man's nature to keener virility. Stooping down, he took her hands in his. "Don't 'ee worrit zo, lass," he said gently, "belave me when I tull

'ee there ain't no wan outzide a man's zulf ez can wark him harm."

She rose to her feet. "'Tis all very fine for 'ee to spake like thic, Ben," she answered; "happen zome folk be built different from t'others: but I've brought temptation nigh the lad, and if he shud fall, and lonesomeness come upon him, 'twull break my heart." Turning away, she began slowly retracing her steps homeward. When later she neared the cottage, smoke was creeping skyward from the chimney in long blue wavy lines.

CHAPTER XVII

FARMER PIGOTT GOES TO EXETER MARKET

ON market-day, some few weeks later, business took Farmer Pigott into Exeter. He returned by the last train, and, reaching home, found that everyone, with the exception of his wife, had retired to bed. Mrs. Pigott glanced at his face. It had a worried, angry expression. She forbore questioning him, and waited while he consumed his supper in silence. At last he pushed back his chair, and, rising, came and stood in front of the fire. A small daguerreotype of Dan as a boy hung above the mantelpiece, and the farmer stared at it with knitted brows.

"The lad's in bed, you say?" he questioned harshly.

"This hour or more," replied his wife, the colour mounting to her plump face, as she foresaw trouble impending for her favourite.

"I've half a mind to turn him stark out o' the house," the farmer continued. "If it wasn't for his father that's dead and lying in the churchyard I wud, too."

"You must be market merry to talk like that, Sam," his wife answered. "Why, what has the lad done?" She spoke briskly, but her heart sank.

"Done!" the farmer repeated. "As good as cheated me out o' ten guineas, for one thing. But 'tiddn't the money; 'tis his slack-twisted ways that gits the better o' me." He was silent a moment, and pulling a chair forward, sat down.

"You know thickey chestnut mare o' mine," he continued—"the wan the lad took and sold into Extur, and comed back along home regular divered cuz he said her only fetched saxty; wull, 'twas seventy, not saxty, guineas that he got for her, and the young blackguard pocketed the difference hiszulf. I wudn't believe it, till the man up and showed me the receipt for the money in the lad's handwriting."

Mrs. Pigott walked to the dresser to hide her agitation, and taking a blue worsted stocking from a drawer, knitted several rows

before answering. "Didn't 'ee tell the lad, Sam," she asked at length, "that you wud be content wi' saxty, and if he got a bit extra he might keep it for hisself?"

"Ay, a bit," the farmer repeated; "but ten guineas be a deal more than 'a bit.' Happen I wudn't have grudged him the money if he had took it open; but these under-hand, low-couraged ways o' his'n I can't abide."

"'Tis hard on 'ee, Sam," Mrs. Pigott answered, putting her plump motherly hand on her husband's shoulder. "You was always one for the shortest way there."

The farmer filled and lit his pipe. "Kinship," he said, blowing a long puff of smoke from his nostrils, "is a queer thing; and many's the time I've axed mysulf why a man that alles acts fair shud be cussed wi' a nevvie that alles acts crooked."

"It's a deal wiser to let such questions bide," Mrs. Pigott answered. "Nature's arithmetic needs a bigger slate and a longer head than us have got to reckon with. After all, 'tiddn't as if the lad was your own chile."

"But he's son to my brother," rejoined the farmer; "and my brother was a rispacted man, and his wife a rispacted woman." Mrs. Pigott made no answer, but let her knitting slip on to her lap, and sat staring straight before her. The firelight was reflected on the great brass warming-pan that hung beside the dresser, where the copper saucepans reposed bottom upwards. Above, again, rows of china plates beamed, moon-faced, across the long low room. "I shud ha' dearly o' liked a chile o' me own," she exclaimed at length. "Many's the time when I have lain wakeful o' nights I've featured him to myself. He shud ha' taken after 'ee in make, Sam, and me in colouring. You thought a deal o' my colouring once," she ended, glancing across at her husband.

He raised his head and their eyes met, the farmer's stern face relaxing into a smile. "You was alles pleasant to look on, then as now," he said.

They were both silent a while, thinking of the past, till the sudden dropping of a coal through the bars into the grey ashes beneath startled the woman from her reverie.

"You won't be hard on Dan, will 'ee?" she asked. "His nater comes cruel to him; the lad has cried hisself to sleep afore now thinking o' it."

"I can't fathom sich a nater as hisn," said the farmer slowly, taking the pipe from between his lips. "And I ain't none o' yer hard judges nuther."

Mrs. Pigott sighed. "Other folks' faults always seems unreasonable to us," she answered. "But there, us ain't axed to fathom, only to forgie 'em. Happen if us minded how cruel painful our own naters fights agin us at times, us wud be a deal more tender - thoughted towards t'other people's."

"Maybe," said the farmer; "but I cud niver abide a liar nor a coward."

"Well, well," his wife answered. "You'll not speak hasty to the lad, will 'ee?"

The old man knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "Naw," he replied, rising and stretching himself—"leastways not willun; but there be times when the very sight o' his hang-dog face angers me into forgitting me-zulf."

Dan awoke in the morning to find his aunt standing by his bedside.

"Dress yourself quick, lad," she said; "I want 'ee to take some butter and eggs into town to-day. I promised Mr. Hogg they shud be in at the grocery by ten sharp. There be one or two bits of things that I want 'ee to do for me besides; and then you may as well drive round by Mary Anne Wort's on your way back home, and leave her a piece o' veal. I hear the poor soul has been ailing sadly o' late, and maybe her'll fancy a taste o' fresh meat."

"Why Miss Wort's be a long way out o' my road," replied Dan, sitting up and rubbing his eyes; "I shan't be back in time for dinner certain, if I hikes round by her cottage."

Mrs. Pigott seated herself at the end of the bed.

"Happen 'twud be just as well if you didn't put in appearance," she answered. "Your uncle's a bit vexed wi' 'ee, and things wud blow over some by supper-time."

The nervous, frightened expression crept into Dan's face, making the kindly woman's heart ache to see it there. "I haven't done

nought," he exclaimed. "What's he angered wi' me for?"

At this moment the farmer was heard calling for Mrs. Pigott, and she rose hastily. "Tiddn't no full-sized anger that he's feeling agin 'ee," she said in a soothing voice, "and if you don't keep the truth back from him, things 'ull soon blow over comfortable enough."

Dan had no further opportunity of questioning his aunt before starting. It was late when he returned home, and supper had been served in the front kitchen. Entering, he took a seat next to Abel Finch. His broad shoulders showed to advantage beside his neighbour's bowed figure; but the farmer, glancing at the two men, contrasted the hang-dog expression on the young fellow's handsome features with the shrewd, direct gaze of the old cow-hind. Watching them, his quick anger rose, and with it a desire to extort a public confession from Dan and force him into speaking the truth against his will.

"William Willet was the man that you sold the mare to, wasn't it?" he asked abruptly.

The colour rushed into Dan's face. "Ess," he said; "William Willet."

"Him as is 'oss-dealer up to Orr?"

"Ess; the zame man."

"Used to breed 'osses down in these parts wan time?"

"Ess."

"I knawed him wull," chimed in Abel. "He wor a rare hand at chating honest, and for a man that can chate honest there bain't no better way to arn a living than 'oss-dealing. Law," he continued, "do 'ee mind that there wall-eyed hunter o' his the Lunnon chap bought so simple; 'cuz whenever Willum rode him at a fence—'oopt' Willum 'ud say, and over the old 'oss 'ud go dainty ez a maid acrass a pool. The Lunnon chap paid his money and took un rare and plazed. Arter a bit back he comes, 'Why, the 'oss be stone-blind,' he sez. 'Oh,' sez Willum, 'tis a 'oss that can zee that you wants; I thought 'twor a 'oss that cud joompt!' Begore, he sharpened his knife on his wits, Willum did."

"He made a good thing o' thickey mare o' mine, anyway," replied the farmer. "Sold

her for ninety guineas into Extur 'oss bazaar. I knaws that, cuz I happened to drop in jist as the hammer fell."

There was a silence, while Abel slowly emptied his cup of tea. "Ay, I can belave it," he answered; "there iddn't Willum Willet's ekal for showing off the points of a 'oss—thirty guineas be a good rise, I'll not deny, but, law bless 'ee, 'tiddn't the 'oss but the man that counts in sich things."

"Zims so," assented the farmer grimly.

Mrs. Pigott, who had been following the course of the conversation with some trepidation, now interposed. "Dear me," she exclaimed, rising, "if I ain't parlous near forgot to put the milk on to scald—my mind might be basted, the way things slip away from it. Now, Abel," she continued to the cow-hind, "come straight along and help me to set them pans, or I shall niver git done." Before leaving the room, however, she stopped beside her husband's chair, resting her hand a moment on his shoulder: she did not speak, but the old farmer understood that she was silently pleading Dan's cause, and his stern face softened. When the door

closed behind her and Abel, he turned to his nephew.

"Lad," he said, leaning forward and fixing his eyes on the young fellow's face, "I be going to ax 'ee a plain question, and I want a plain answer. What price did 'ee get for thickey mare?"

Dan had been steeling himself to confront his uncle's anger, and the mildness of his tone disconcerted him: he shifted his position uneasily, but made no reply.

"Well," exclaimed the farmer. "Speak out, lad; the truth be the shortest way there."

A hundred questions surged through Dan's brain. Had his uncle discovered the whole truth? If not, how much of the truth had he learned?

The old man watched him with a certain grim kindness: putting out his hand, he touched the young fellow's sleeve. "Speak up; I ain't going to be angered with 'ee."

To Dan, smarting under a sense of shame, the words had a contemptuous sound, a longing to be done with deceit: to play a man's part for once possessed him, goading him into hasty speech.

"I ain't afeard o' yer anger," he burst out; "I tull 'ee the truth, God's truth—'twor, 'twor——" he stopped short—" 'twor," he repeated hoarsely—but the truth refused to be uttered. His anger collapsed, fear took possession of him. "Ain't I told 'ee all along 'twor saxty guineas," he ended.

For a moment the two men sat staring at each other, and the lie seemed as some living thing between them. Then the farmer pushed back his chair and left the room without a word.

After a while Mrs. Pigott returned, cleared away the supper things, took out her knitting, and sat down in front of the fire. Dan had let his head sink between his hands, and the only sound in the room was the clack, clack of the needles. At last he rose.

"Be 'ee going to bed, lad?" his aunt asked.

"Ess," he answered, going over to where she sat. "Good-night," he added, stooped and kissed her. She put her two hands on his shoulders and held him a little away from her, so that she could see his face. "Be 'ee content to let things bide as they be?" she said.

Drawing himself upright, he rested his arms on the mantelpiece and his head upon them in sullen despair. "Tiddn't no use wasting wuds talking," he answered. "I'm sick o' the sound o' speech."

The farmer's heavy tread was audible outside. Dan left the room hastily; he met his uncle in the passage, and the two men passed each other in silence. A few moments later the farmer entered the kitchen.

"The lad lied agin," he said, seating himself beside his wife. "He's as rotten as touchwood."

Mrs. Pigott made no answer, knitting steadily on. "Human nater be a limiting thing," she exclaimed at last.

"Maybe," said the farmer—"but I guv the lad a fair chance. I'll niver gie him anuther. The next time I catches him at his slack-twisted ways, out he goes, sure as my name is Samuel Pigott. Ay, but 'tis a hard thing," he continued, rising from his chair, "for a man who has lived upright all his life, to have a nevvv wi' a nater like thic."

"'Tis hard for 'ee," his wife assented; "but oh, Sam, 'tis a deal harder for the lad."

CHAPTER XVIII

MARY ANNE WORT AND MARTHA STIGGINS ADJUST THEIR DIFFERENCES

OCTOBER came, and with it a rush of north wind, twisting the branches off the trees and making the outlines of the moor stand up sharp against the horizon. Mary Anne Wort had fallen ill, and the villagers, discussing the matter among themselves, shook their heads. "Her's got the lonesome-fret," they said, "and when folks git that they don't last long."

Some of the more serious-minded among them, after condoling with her on the subject of her illness, suggested that it might be sound policy to "make up the old bee and bloater score with Martha Stiggins." At first the sick woman refused to hear of any cessation of hostilities, remarking that "if the Almighty wor a judge o' bloaters, He

wud be on her side, never fail"; but, as the days went on and her strength dwindled, she expressed a desire to see her old enemy.

One cold blustering day Mrs. Stiggins, a stout woman with a shifty expression, arrived and was shown into the front room by a neighbour. The table was laid for tea, and Mrs. Stiggins did ample justice to the good things provided.

"Law," she exclaimed, helping herself a fifth time to buttered toast, "I don't grudge no one my forgiveness: The Bible says forgive free, and I forgives free, and when, so to speak, the corpse is already inside o' my enemy's body, why then I hastens."

Her voice was loud and piercing, and in the ensuing silence Mary Anne Wort could be heard moving restlessly in the room above. A gleam of satisfaction lit up the guest's face as she listened.

"'Twas an old saying of my mother's," she continued, after a pause, "'Unsought by men, untaught by God,' and if there be one pussen who has lived lonesome and self-applauding, 'tis that poor castaway in the next room there. Not that I wants to be hard upon her

—no, I leaves that to her Maker, and when the message comed that her was wishful of forgiveness, I turned to my daughter, who was standing by peeling potatoes. ‘Eliza Jane,’ I said, ‘fetch me down my best bonnet wi’ the yaller roses, for ’tis that I’ll wear and no other; ain’t the Book told us there is more joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety-nine just persons that need no repentance?’ ‘Well, mother,’ her answered, ‘there’s a spit o’ rain on, and if I was you I wouldn’t risk it; them roses will spoil for certain.’ ‘And let ’em spoil,’ I said; ‘what’s spoilt roses set agin the satisfaction o’ finding your enemy in the wrong?’ ‘Ay,” she ended, rising, “if there is one pussen more than another who understands the joys of heaven, ’tis myself. The Jidgment Day will be a fine upstanding moment; but many’s the time I’ve wondered why the Almighty, with all eternity before Him, shudn’t spread the jidging out more.”

When a few minutes later she entered the room where her enemy sat propped up very stiff and straight in bed, Mary Anne Wort received her with a certain rigid courtesy.

"Wor the tea to your liking?" she asked.

"'Twas tasty tea," replied Mrs. Stiggins, with a politeness that somewhat disconcerted herself.

"And there wor nought to complain of about the toast?"

"No; 'twas very passable."

"Well," continued Mary Anne, motioning her guest to a chair, "'twor for other things than thic that I wanted your presence. 'Tis a matter o' ten years now, Martha Stiggins, if I reckons right, since us fell out over they bloaters. I told 'ee at the time that forgetfulness niver comed light to me, and I ain't forgotten; then, this spring again, when my bees settled promiscuous on your apple-tree, you held to 'em." The sick woman paused a moment and coughed harshly. "I've told 'ee whiles enough what I thought o' sich goings on," she continued, "and there iddn't no call for repeating o' it now; but this I'll say, I made up my mind from the fust that when death took me I'd lay the matter afore the Almighty Hiszulf: 'tis a personable pleasure when you know you've been treated poor to

hear the same from the lips of them you rispect."

Again a fit of coughing interrupted her, and when it ceased she leaned back a little wearily on the pillows. "I ain't been over well lately," she said; "suffering may be from the lonesome-fret and sich—this be an un-speechful spot, facing lonesome each way. Sometimes I reckon that it mayn't be long afore the churchyard has me. I don't complain, tho' 'tis a quiet end to one who has a liking for speech; but there, 'tiddn't to be expected that us shall get rid o' all the contrarifying when us comes to die, and I don't ask it—on'y as I said, I've thought to myself 'twud be a satisfying thing to hear the Almighty's opinion on that old bee and bloater score. Howsomever, not further back than the night afore last I wor lying here all by myself, the same as I do most nights. The blind wor up, and I cud see the moor there, stretched out that quiet I cud almost hear the silence tread across it. The moon had riz, 'twor new, and the poor little skiddick threaded its way droo the darkness kind o' insecure; but the stars reg'lar rang in the sky,

they looked that bright and hard. Kaining up at 'em made me think o' the gates o' heaven flashing agin the darkness o' the night, and I kind o' figured to mezulf God on His great white throne and me laying my cause afore Him. Then all to a sudden it seemed a mortal tiddlewinkie cause to call to mind up there, and it kind o' made me hot all over to think o' axing the Almighty to listen to it. There comed to me they wuds from the Book, 'His ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts,' and I tarned my eyes away from the stars kind o' tiptoe, and I said to myself I'll make up that old bloater score here on earth. I'll not go into heaven smelling o' a chandler's shop!" She was silent a moment, and the tired lids closed over her fierce blue eyes. Martha Stiggins regarded her uneasily. After a moment, however, the sick woman sat up with sudden determination. "So I sent for you here to-day to ax your pardon for any wuds o' mine said ill-considered," she continued, extending a thin, wrinkled hand towards her enemy. "But mind this," she added, as Martha Stiggins tentatively accepted the proffered hand,

"if I gits well things shall be the same as they were afore. And now I wish 'ee 'good-day' and a pleasant walk home." So saying she released her clasp, lay down, turning her back to her enemy and her face to the wall.

It was a cold blustering afternoon some few days later that Mary Anne Wort, her head and shoulders enveloped in a purple worsted shawl, sat up in a truckle-bed that had been placed, for convenience sake, in the corner of the kitchen. Beside her, on the round table, was a bottle of cough-mixture and the stuffed cat. A neighbour moved heavily about the room preparing tea. She was a thick-set woman with a stolid, kindly face.

"I was reckoning," she said, taking the kettle off the fire as she spoke, "that when I have gived 'ee your drap o' tea and tidied things up a bit I had better be going back along home. There's a deal o' mangling to do, and my daughter be just one o' they cat-handed pussens that be always doing, doing, but niver gits no forarder. I've told her many a time that two comes after one, and 'tiddn't no manner o' use trying to run

'em at the same time ; but, law, her'll niver larn, bless 'ee, her's too anxious to be up and acting."

When the tea-things had been cleared away, and everything made tidy, the woman took her bonnet and shawl down from a peg behind the door.

"I shall be round the first thing in the morning," she said. "There iddn't nought more I can do for 'ee. Shall I lock the door and take the key along home?"

Mary Anne cast a wistful glance towards the window ; the dusk was already gathering on the moor outside. "Best leave the key," she answered ; "I can git out and tarn it mezulf later. Happen a neighbour might drop in."

"As you will," replied the woman ; "but 'tiddn't a neighboursome spot, this."

Hardly, however, had she left the cottage, before there came a knock at the door, and Phoebe entered, carrying a small parcel. She looked a little hesitatingly at Mary Anne Wort, as if she was not quite sure of her welcome ; but the sick woman's face brightened, and seeing it, the girl's face

brightened also, and she came and sat down beside her.

"I wanted to come afore," she explained, "but there wor a little sommat I wor making for 'ee to wear now you be so much in bed, and I thought maybe 'twud be pleasant to git it done fust."

She opened the parcel as she spoke, and displayed a soft white knitted shawl. The sick woman eyed it with eager curiosity. "Why," she exclaimed, "I shall look real dand in that!"

Phoebe wrapped it round her, and when she had done so, stooped and kissed one of the worn, wrinkled hands that lay on the patchwork quilt. "I wor afeared maybe you'd look unfriendzome on it cuz 'twor my work; but you don't," she exclaimed gratefully.

Mary Anne Wort glanced down on the girl's bent head with its heavy coils of soft brown hair. "I wor niver wan for dragging the past into the present," she said. "There be alles zome dinky bit o' truth that you leaves behind."

Both women were silent awhile, and the moon rose and peered in upon them.

"I ain't niver ax 'ee if you wor feeling more yourzulf again," Phoebe said at length.

"I shan't do that this side o' the grave," Mary Anne replied. "Folks say," she continued, "that the lonesome-fret is on me; but 'tiddn't that, 'tiddn't that."

"What ails 'ee, then, Anne?" asked the girl, softly.

"I can't fathom it," the sick woman answered, after a pause. "Happen 'tis cuz I've seen they I care for most act beneath their-zulves."

Phoebe looked up at her. "But you ain't brought 'em to it," she exclaimed passionately; "'tis thic that breaks the heart."

"No; I ain't brought 'em to it," the woman repeated; "but then I ain't stood by 'em when they fell. And how shall the weak-some rise if they that loves 'em best deserts 'em?"

"Oh, Anne!" said the girl. "What do 'ee reckon a woman shud do?"

There was a long silence, and Mary Anne Wort's face grew set and stern. "I knaws, but I ain't a-done it," she answered, "and maybe 'tis thic that's killing me. Her shud

stand atween them and their sin, that's what her shud do, even if her brought suffering on 'em. 'Tis better to see they you love punished o' man than o' God. Do you mind they wuds in the Book, many's the time I've thought o' 'em lying here—' For what is a man profited if he shud gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? ' "

Phoebe sank her head down upon the worn patchwork quilt. " 'Tis hard, hard, hard to see they that you loves suffer," she sobbed.

CHAPTER XIX

SILAS TRUSTGORE COMES FOR THE FIVE POUNDS

LATE one afternoon, when dusk was creeping westward across the moor, Dan, having fetched his gun, strolled through the farm in search of rabbits. It had been blowing hard all day, but with sundown the wind had dropped, and frost starched the face of the fields. Tramping along, Dan suddenly kicked up a hare from a patch of coarse grass. It scudded in the direction of the spinney, and, when on the point of passing out of range, fell victim to the gun.

"Clean shot thic," exclaimed a voice that made the young fellow start, and Silas Trustgore slowly twisted himself over a gate and came towards him. The two men had not met since the day of the mare's sale, and Dan watched his enemy's approach with a sinking heart.

"Well, what do you want wi' me now?" he exclaimed in a sullen voice.

Silas drew closer before answering. "I zeed," he said, "zome grey plover ez I comed along; if us hikes down to the marshes right away, happen us 'ull get a shot at 'em yit."

The young fellow's face brightened; he hurried away in the direction indicated, Silas following behind at a dog-trot. A brace of lapwings flapped heavily past them, and were brought to earth by a smart right and left.

"You bain't no zany wi' the goon," exclaimed the hostler, a note of genuine admiration in his voice. Dan's heart warmed.

"You may try a shot yerzulf if you be a-mind," he said.

"Wull, maybe I wull," replied Silas, stretching out his hand for the gun. "If us cud put up a snipe now, I reckon I shud be ekal to un;—I sorter know his twisty ways instinctive——"

Night greyed in rapidly as they tramped along. "'Tiddn't no manner o' use gwaying funder; 'tis gitting too dark by a deal," ex-

claimed the hostler, pulling up. Then, with an abrupt change of voice, he added, "What about they five puns you owes me?"

Dan had a quick vision of approaching trouble. "Five pun," he repeated. "I niver heard that I owed 'ee five pun. And if I did, I couldn't pay ut."

They were standing near a stile; Silas flung a leg across and sat down before answering.

"You be wonderful simple constructed," he said, "to reckon I shud waste my time axing for zommat that worn't getatable. Naw, there be small profit in hanging a vule if you don't have his skin afterwards." He was silent a moment, and laying a shrivelled hand on the young fellow's arm, peered into his face.

"Who did 'ee kindiddle into giving 'ee money afore? Why, Phoebe Hazeldene. And who shud 'ee kindiddle into giving it to 'ee now? Why, the zame. Her'll gie ut to 'ee smart enough; her won't grudge 'ee nort. Ain't her gone further than *giving* 'ee money? Ain't her—wull—'tiddn't no use wordifying sich acts, now things ha' changed; her baing

well-to-do, so to speak, since her uncle left her his bit o' money?"

"I ain't niver thought on Phœbe ez well-to-do," Dan exclaimed truthfully. Silas glanced at him in surprise.

"'Tis a poor thing for a man to be a knave and vule at wan and the same time," he said. "You might have got a deal out o' the maid afore this, and her that sweet on 'ee. But law, you zim to be ez rotten at head ez at heart."

The blood surged hotly into the young fellow's face. "I bain't no knave and I bain't no vule; neither wan nor t'other."

There was a moment's pause while the hostler raised the gun, looked slowly along the barrel, and then dropped the butt-end back once more to earth. "Wull, wull," he answered; "happen you be more vule than knave, and you be a decent shot anyways."

Dan was a little mollified. "Look here," he exclaimed eagerly; "I reckon you don't know, not baing over and above personable in looks yerzulf, how soft the maids be to me, and yit I niver took no unfair advantage o' 'em, never——"

A sardonic smile stretched itself across the old hostler's leathery face: "Ay, they be light to plaze, be the maids; light to plaze."

"Noo, 'tiddn't that 'tall," corrected Dan hotly; "'tis jest if you plazes, you plazes."

"Law, have it which way you wull. You be a vine lad on your own showing, there's no misdoubting that."

"'Struth, but I cud ha' had a deal more than I took, anyways," replied Dan, throwing out his chest. His face brightened, as the comfortable feeling of self-esteem that had been missing in him of late returned. "You holds me for a deal wuss than I be."

Silas thrust his hands deep down into the pockets of his riding-breeches. "Happen I do, happen I don't," he answered. "Howsomever, that's neither here nor there; 'tworn't thic that I comed here to talk to 'ee about. Maybe you've heard tell that when Cap'en Brattle sold thickey ketch o' his'n he bought a share in a trawler. Wull, not longer back than the night afore last that the maid drawed ten pun from the zame. I zed to mezulf at the time, 'There,' I zed, 'goes five pun for Silas Trustgore;' but law, now

I comes to think o' ut, I reckon I'll take the lot. 'Tis a round sum, and a deal safer long o' me than wi' a love-twisted wench."

The tone of calm assurance in which the words were spoken irritated Dan and at the same time chilled his courage.

"If you think I'll git the money for 'ee, you thinks wrong," he answered sharply.

"Na," said Silas, "na; I reckon not; I reckon not. Leastways," he added, assuming a disconcerted air, "if I haven't been holding the maid for veeling softer towards 'ee than her do."

"'Tiddn't thic; I cud git the money sharp enough."

The hostler's deep-set eyes twinkled. "H'mn," he exclaimed, "h'mn."

Dan reddened. "Do 'ee reckon I cudn't?" he retorted quickly.

There was a moment's pause. Silas readjusted his position.

"Zeeing's belaving," he answered. "When a lad tulls me ha cud if ha wud but ha won't—wull—wull. I draws me own conclusion from the zame——"

The young fellow felt strangely irritated:

he turned away, and stood with his back towards Silas. "I tull 'ee what," he exclaimed, "I'll git that money, jest to show 'ee. Dash me if I don't."

An expression half amused, half contemptuous, crossed the old man's face: "I'm glad to hear 'ee zay thic."

"For why?"

"Cuz if you hadn't bin willun I shud ha bin fosed to make 'ee do ut unwillun."

"What do 'ee mean?"

"'Tis plain enough."

"*You* fose me!"

Silas slowly twisted himself down from the stile and faced the young fellow.

"'Twud ha' ecome to that, most like," he answered.

The blood swirled up to Dan's brain. "You lil' lean-livered impudent to-ad!" he burst out, "I'll be damned if I gie 'ee a penny."

"You be mortal much a vule at making things wuss for yezulf," replied the old man, stooping and picking up the hare. "I reckon I'll take this snip o' a leveret back along 'ome and bile un up wi' a few onions and sich.

Wull, wull, you can ride over and git the money next Sunday arternoon and bring it across to me the vallowing Monday night—that ull gie 'ee the best part o' a week to larn reason."

So saying, he hobbled away in the direction of the main road. Dan stood looking across the fields which turned their frost-bitten faces to the grey sky. Below, in the marshes, a heron rose and sailed away into the rapidly gathering dusk. The scene was gaunt enough, but the young fellow's eyes rested on the sordid tragedy of his own life.

"Let un do his wuss, I defy un," he muttered; but his heart sank, and keenly as he was conscious of his degradation, the dread lest he should be unable to rise above it proved keener.

CHAPTER XX

THAT WHICH LOVE WOULD DO

THE days passed and were full of torture to Dan, yet, when Sunday came, and with it the necessity of making a final decision, he longed to thrust the evil hour farther from him. He had a young mare in the stables that he was breaking into harness, and when the mid-day meal was over, he put her in the dog-cart and drove away across the moor. The road he took led to Phœbe Hazeldene's cottage; he told himself that the choice of ways had been accidental. Once the shelter of the hill left behind, the north-west wind flung itself full upon him. The mare pricked her ears, snorted, and quickened pace. Overhead, teal and curlew flew wheeling and crying, and the moor seemed to shiver as the sullen water-courses striped their way across its broad back. Meanwhile, at the cottage, Phoebe sat

in the big rocking-chair before the kitchen fire. Hannah, who never willingly missed a service, had trudged off alone to church. Outside, the gulls, caught by the wind, were driven past the cottage window inland, and their wild melancholy cries as they strove to fight their way back once more to the sea rang through the small room. Listening to them, Phoebe fell into a dreamy mood and failed to notice the sound of passing wheels. A few moments later Dan lifted the latch and entered. He looked haggard and ill, and the girl rose to her feet, startled more by his altered appearance than by his sudden entry.

"What ails 'ee, lad?" she asked, coming towards him. The sight of her beautiful young face, full of tender commiseration and anxiety on his account, was very comforting to Dan. He led her back to the old rocker, and, drawing up another seat beside it, sat down. "I wud jest like to bide quiet here a while and think," he said.

For a while neither spoke; but their hearts, beating on the chord of silence, placed them in intimate communion. Then suddenly they turned and looked each into

the other's face : he held out his arms, and she, leaning forward, laid her head upon his breast.

"Oh, lass," he exclaimed, "I'm ruined—stock, lock, and barrel."

She raised her eyes protestingly. "'Tiddn't true, Dan," she said. "You be a deal too young to talk o' ruin."

"Ay, 'tis true enough," he repeated; "Silas Trustgore has me body and soul. I've defied un to his vace, but—but——" he stopped short, leaving the sentence unfinished.

Her face softened pityingly. "Tell me your worrits, lad," she answered. "Happen us can mend 'em a-tween us."

"Oh," he said, "'tis a long tale, and I reckon I shall niver make 'ee understand jest how things be."

She knelt down beside him and took both his hands in hers. "When a woman loves a lad as I do thee, Dan," she answered, "her be mortal understandful."

He made no reply. She rubbed her face softly against the sleeve of his coat. "Tell on, lad," she said. "My heart 'ull sort o' go wi' 'ee."

Looking down at her small shapely head resting against his arm, he forgot his troubles

"Phœbe!" he exclaimed abruptly, "us ain't talked o' marrying this long while."

She shrank back, startled and blushing. "Twull niver come to that a-tween us now, lad," she said. "Yer uncle wudn't hear tull o' sich a thing."

Her reticence inflamed his need of her. "But it must come to ut," he answered, trying to draw her closer. "I can't live wi'out 'ee."

She submitted unwillingly. "'Tiddn't marriage us shud be tulling o' now," she replied, "but jest how best to mend things."

He released his clasp on her arm. "Ay," he said, flinging himself back in his chair, "if on'y you hadn't took thic money. Every mortal thing has gone awry since."

The words left her shivering like some wounded animal.

"Oh, lad, I meant so well by 'ee," she protested. "I kind o' reckoned that if I acted unrightful the punishment 'ud vall on me alone; but it's valled on thee instead."

Not generous enough to understand her

suffering, he was silent, pondering on the hardness of his own fate, and, as with all weak natures, he held his circumstances and not himself responsible. Still smarting from the treatment that Silas had meted out to him, he found a certain melancholy pleasure in tracing back the origin of his sufferings to the fount of Phœbe's misdoings.

"Ess," he said, "Silas Trustgore wud niver have had me in his power if it hadn't bin for 'ee."

The thought that she was responsible for all his misfortunes was unbearable to her. "Lad," she exclaimed passionately, rising to her feet, "you must free yerzulf—I can't bear to ha' brought ill to 'ee, I can't bear ut—I can't bear ut." Her insistence irritated him. "Bear ut!" he repeated, "wan wud reckon that 'twor you, not me, Silas wor foking into playing the blackguard. But 'tiddn't no use talking; I've got to find ten pun by termarrer night. He swears he'll ruin me if I don't. There"—he ended, rising angrily from his chair—"I've told 'ee, and I hadn't meant to say a wud about ut."

She paid no heed to his disclaimer. "Ten pun!" she cried, in astonishment. "Where wull 'ee git ten pun?"

Dan looked at her almost with hatred. It seemed to him that she at least ought to realise from whom he must obtain the money. She read his thoughts and his displeasure at the same moment.

"Lad," she exclaimed, humbly, "I'm that unused to the having o' money, I sort o' forgot."

His position was so ignominious that he could not forgive her for accentuating it. "I niver axed you for the ten pun," he said. "Happen I shall let things take their course."

Her face lit up with sudden hope. "'Twud be better for 'ee in the end," she answered.

"Ay," he replied, with a sneer, "and cheaper for zome o' us."

Phoebe paid no heed to the innuendo. "Dan," she said, coming close to him, "have 'ee iver reckoned out what it means to be in the hands of a bad man zame as Silas Trustgore? S'posing you gie him they ten pun,

how long do 'ee reckon he'll rest content? S'posing wan day yer uncle dies and leaves 'ee the varm, do you reckon 'twull be yer-zulf or Silas Trustgore who'll be the master o' it?"

The young fellow flung himself into a chair with a half-articulate groan.

"I've seen that this long while," he answered, "but what can I do?"

She was silent a moment looking into the fire. "I know, lad, you won't be for believing me when I tell 'ee there be on'y wan way and that be to make a friend o' yer uncle," she replied at last. "Varmer Pigott belongs to they folk who'll forgie nigh on most things except lies."

"Ay, and I've lied to him over this from the fust."

"Well, go and tull him so to his vace and mark me if he don't forgie 'ee the vust a-cause o' the last. Can't 'ee zee, lad, that life 'ull be a deal happier for 'ee if yer makes up yer mind wance for all to ha' done wi' lies. Silas cudn't hurt 'ee then. 'Twud be worth a bigger risk than the losing o' the varm, to be done wi' sich scoundrels ez he;

and then, Dan, what a vine upstanding thing the truth be, look at it which way yer wull, and how a man who tulls it is rispacted o' hiszulf and others. 'Tiddn't no light day's work to speak things out ez they be, special when they tells agin yerzulf; but lad, 'tis by the doing o' sich work that a man earns standing room to face life."

Her face glowed as she spoke, as if her spirit were radiating through her flesh, and Dan, sitting listening, became half enamoured of the vision that she had conjured up.

"You wud have me act like that cuz you're a woman," he answered doubtingly. "A woman 'ull alles travel further than a man when the spirit's on her."

She came close to him. "Ay, cuz I be a wuman," she repeated with a kind of triumph. "Cuz a wuman needs that the man her loves shud act the man. Her's weak herzulf; her life winds around the tiddleli-winkie and the small, and her gits a hunger for the upstanding in her lad. Oh, Dan," she continued, throwing herself upon her knees beside him—" 'tis cuz I love 'ee so I ax it of 'ee—'tis my love that wud have 'ee

do it—'tis my love that can't abide to zee 'ee vall lower than yerzulf."

Her words stirred him. "I'll do it, I'll do it!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet. Then, as the memory of all he had suffered at Silas' hands returned to him, he continued with rising passion: "I'll teach the blackguard what I think o' him. I ain't niver sought o' brought mezulf to hit him yet, but I'll hit him now; I'll grind his face for him; I'll lay the kicks on pretty thick; I'll make that old leathery body of his dance to a new tune, dang me if I don't. Lass," he stuttered, almost breathless from emotion, "I'll go straight away back and tull uncle now. I'll risk bein' tarned out; I'll risk losing the farm, 'tis worth more than that to get quits wi' thickey scoundrel. Put on yer bonnet, lass, you shall hear me speak out like a man—by God Almighty! I've had enough o' lying."

A few minutes later they were driving swiftly in the direction of the farm. The wind blew in their faces, but they were in a fighting mood, and their young blood thrilled at its fierce embrace; the wide-

stretching moor slurred itself out in brown immensity, as if it were the cast-off skin of some monster born before the birth of Spirit. They looked on it and laughed: Dan gave the mare her head, and they sped forward under a low-lying sky. Suddenly the wind, as if tired of buffeting them, fell, and clouds gathered massing on the horizon's edge. The ground began to ascend, and the mare, slackening pace, fell at last into a walk. It was at this moment that Silas met them; he was mounted on a grey Exmoor pony. At sight of him Dan halted involuntarily and sat with his eyes fixed on Silas. Fear crept through him; a sense of being mastered: he longed to be angry, but his pulses beat slow and there was no defiance in his blood. The hostler glanced from the young fellow to the girl at his side, and burst into a loud cackling laugh.

"Drive on, lad," said Phoebe, shame colouring her face. But Dan had lost the power of initiative; he sat with his eyes fixed on the hostler as some slave awaiting his master's orders. Again Silas broke into a loud cackling laugh; the sound of it seemed

to pierce the girl's heart derisively. She caught Dan by the sleeve. "Drive on, lad," she repeated. "Oh, don't 'ee zee he's torturing us a-puppus?"

Dan paid no heed to her, and Silas rode a few steps nearer. "Termarrer night at eight sharp I shall be waiting for 'ee," he said.

Gathering up the reins, the young fellow drove on. When the hostler was no longer in sight, he halted the mare once more. "'Tiddn't no use," he said; "the man's my master, and I can't work agin him."

Looking at her lover with the memory of the past scene in her mind, terror took possession of Phoebe. "Rouse yerzulf, lad," she cried, shaking him by the arm. "Silas be on'y a man the zame ez you be."

"'Tiddn't no use; 'tiddn't no use," he repeated hopelessly. "I'm afeard o' un, zame as I wor niver afeard o' no mortal afore. I reckoned I wor free if I chose, but I ain't. I reckoned I cud work agin him if I wud, but I can't—cuss him for ut—cuss him!"

"Dan, Dan!" she pleaded, "don't 'ee speak like thic; 'twull break my heart."

He turned the mare's head round. "Us must

drive back and git the money," he exclaimed. "I've got to find it by termarrer night."

She covered her face with her hands and the tears forced a way through her fingers. The clouds swept lower and the rain fell. Suddenly she ceased crying, and raised her head. "Dan," she said, and her voice sounded strange in his ears; "you'd best stop; I ain't going to gie 'ee the money!"

He drew the mare sharp up on her haunches. "What do you mean?" he demanded sharply.

"I won't have no hand in making a slave of 'ee," she said. "I'd rather zee 'ee turned out o' the varm. I'd rather see 'ee dead at my feet than in the power o' sich a man."

"But you must give me the money," he pleaded; and when she still persisted in her refusal, he turned on her and accused her of being the cause of his ruin. "'Twor you that brought me to this," he said; "and now you grudge the miserable ten pun that wud zee me a free man."

So they parted; and she crept across the moor homewards, and the rain fell in a blinding grey sheet between her and her lover.

CHAPTER XXI

PHOEBE FINDS THE DEAD CAPTAIN'S LOVE- LETTERS

Wet and tired, Phoebe reached home. After changing her gown, the girl lit the lamp; she felt no inclination to eat, but sat staring aimlessly in front of her. The light fell on the old rocking-chair, recalling Dan's presence so vividly that the sight of it became unbearable to her, and after a while she rose and pushed the chair away into a dark corner of the room. In doing so her attention was attracted by a square mahogany box, which had belonged to the dead Captain. It was a ship's medicine-chest. The four corners were brass-clamped, and inscribed across the lid was the following text from the Psalms: "Blessed are they that always keep judgment." Moved more by desire to change the current of her

thoughts than by curiosity, Phoebe opened the chest. At the first cursory glance the contents seemed to be of a somewhat disciplinary nature — asafœtida, jalap, tartar emetic, powdered crabs' claws, antimonial wine. The girl lifted out the square glass bottles with languid interest. In trying to return one of them to its place, she inadvertently touched a spring in connection with a secret drawer at the back of the chest, which opening, revealed inside a packet of letters, yellow with age and bound by a watered silk ribbon as faded as themselves. A faint scent of cedar clung about the letters. Lifting them out of the drawer, she carried them nearer to the light. Unknown to herself, Phoebe had at that moment a hunger for all that referred to the beautiful side of love, and in some subtle way the faded, perfumed packet gave promise of an inner fragrance. Drawing one of the envelopes from the sheaf she glanced at the inscription. It was addressed in the Captain's handwriting to a Miss Priscilla Graceworthy. Who, she wondered, glancing hesitatingly at the first page, was Miss Priscilla Graceworthy? Again the

cedar perfume, as some faint inarticulate cry for protection, pressed itself upon her.

"They be love-letters," she exclaimed; "happen I had best let 'em rest on."

But even while she spoke she had commenced reading; from time to time she put down the letters and fell into a dream. It was at one of these moments that the pedlar entered. He had come with a message from Hannah. Phœbe neither heeded his knock nor his entrance, but sat, her head thrown back and her eyes grey with dreams. Her face was turned in his direction, and looking at its delicate outlines it seemed to him as if it were not flesh but bare spirit that he gazed upon. Watching her, he felt strangely troubled; for him a new fear was born into the world and pain given a keener edge because this woman was capable of suffering. His solicitude became a palpable thing, touching her so that she grew aware of his presence.

"O Ben!" she exclaimed, "you must have come in wonderful quiet,—I niver marked 'ee."

"I wor passing this way, I thought I'd jest

drop in and have a bit o' a tell," he answered. "Happen you didn't know that Hannah's sweetheart's back home from the sea. Maybe you didn't reckon Hannah had a sweetheart?" he ended, smiling.

Phoebe sat up, suddenly animated. "You be joking!" she exclaimed. "'Tiddn't no ways Hannah, that."

"Oh, her met him wonderful unconsarned, I'll no deny," he answered. "Folks wi' hearts have a queer way o' showing 'em at whiles." He glanced at the letters that lay spread out upon her knee. "Why," he continued, "they be old and *divered*,¹ them letters, bain't they?"

"The folks be dead that wrote 'em," she said.

He made no reply, and there was silence in the room except for the cry of the wind.

"Ben," she exclaimed suddenly, "they wor mortal true wan to t'other they two dead folk!"

He smiled down on her pityingly, tenderly. "Happen us be all truer wan to t'other than us reckons on," he answered.

¹ Faded.

She rose from her chair, and walking to the window, stood peering out into the darkness of the night. "Things zim simple; but they iddn't, they iddn't!" she exclaimed passionately. "Folks tull 'ee that 'tis a deal better to zee they you love perish o' hunger than that they shud sin agin God; but s'posing they be too weak to profit—what then? You wud on'y have added wan more ill to their load. 'Twor the Almighty that made 'em weak—must He alles, alles be punishing 'em acause o' it? Must wan be called upon to step in the zame ez the perlice and hand 'em over to the law, when wan knows all the while 'tiddn't punishment but jest a dinky bit o' time to find their better zelves agin that they be so sore in need of. Folk bain't alles the better for baing punished—there be zome that walks a deal nearer God prosperous than cast down."

The pedlar listened to her appeal in silence.

"A man must zee a sight further than I can to answer questions the like o' they," he said, after a pause. "Good and bad lie turrible close wan to t'other, but 'twud be a poor thing to fear to do right a-cuz o' it."

"Ay, if there wor no wan outside o' yer-zulf to suffer, maybe," she protested; "but s'posing 'twor wan you loved: s'posing you zed to un, 'I'll stand atween 'ee and yer punishment no more. 'Tis better for 'ee to vall into the hands o' God than into the hands o' men.' S'posing he wor shamed afore men, and tarned an outcast from the home where he wor born and where he hoped to die, and s'posing arter all he didn't tarn his vace back agin to the Almighty—What then? S'posing he wor too weak to profit—What then?"

The pedlar's rugged face lit up with stern triumph; he knew she spoke of Dan, but for the moment he forgot him in the question at issue. "Who be us," he exclaimed, "that us shud play at wet-nurse wi' other folk's souls? Who be us that us shud zay to 'em, 'Come shelter agin our breast, you iddn't strong enough yit to meet the Almighty vace to vace. Wait awhile, us 'ull stand atween 'ee and God.' Lass," he continued more gently, "'tiddn't for the like o' sich ez you and I be to ha' the picking and choosing o' sich things. Us be poor machines, most o' us, and this life don't zim much

more than a trial trip. Happen when it comes to the jidging 'twon't be condemnation that the Lord 'ull be for meting out, but jest readjustment."

Phoebe made no answer, but fell to sobbing quietly. He drew near and laid his hand upon her shoulder. "Lass," he said, "why be 'ee zo mortal afeard o' life?"

She looked at him with tear-dimmed piteous eyes. "They that I love must zuffer," she answered. "I can't zee no furdur than thic; do what I wull I can't zee no furdur than thic."

A curious pang shot through him, almost as if his heart had been nailed back from beating. "What be there in women," he exclaimed with sudden anger, "that they shud alles love best thic that brings 'em the most zarrer!"

"What do 'ee knaw o' them I loves best?" she flared back at him, indignant. "You iddn't no right jidge o' sich ez they. You, who talks zo glib o' punishing."

Her words struck him like blows; but she had no mercy, turning on him with all the injustice of a defender of an unjust cause.

"I wish I had niver trusted 'ee," she said. "I might ha' knawed how 'twud be. I wud a deal liefer turn to a ripe back-slider for comfort than to wan o' yer just men—the vust knaws anyway what temptation be, and how turrible near folks can git to right wi'out doing o' ut."

The pedlar listened to her denunciation of him in silence. His heart was hammering out a message to his brain, while he himself, standing, as it seemed to him, behind heart and brain alike, fought with a desire to take the angry woman in his arms, and quell her misery and indignation in the mastery of his love. Then with a rush he remembered that she was not and never could be his. Putting out a hand, he steadied himself against the wall.

"I hadn't no speshil wish to speak unkind o' them you love, lass," he said; "God knows I wor niver wan for hasty jidging."

But she did not relent. "Jidging!" she repeated—"what call ha' sich es 'ee to come jidging? But if jidge you must, why don't 'ee take to jidging me? Ain't I tarned mezulf inter a thief?"

The expression on the girl's face as she trailed her name through the dirt in defence of her lover, was almost regal in its pride, and, watching it, Ben did her homage.

"You do wull to be angert," he said.
 "What do I knaw o' the rights o' things?"

Taking up his cap, he left the cottage.

CHAPTER XXII

PHOEBE'S REQUEST

THAT night Phoebe could not sleep, and when dawn fell cold and grey across the moor she rose and dressed herself. Creeping noiselessly downstairs she went out and took the road that led to Mary Anne Wort's cottage. It lay about an hour's walk from her home. In spite of the earliness of the hour, the blinds were drawn up when she approached, and going nearer she saw one of the villagers leave the cottage with a basket on her arm. Mary Anne Wort turned her fierce troubled eyes upon the girl as she entered the small kitchen; they peered out at her full of life, a strange contrast to the shrivelled wasted face in which they were set. It seemed to Phoebe that approaching death had vanquished every passion in the dying woman but her pride.

"Why, what ails 'ee, lass?" she exclaimed

sharply ; "you don't zim no ways yerzulf this morning."

Phœbe advanced to the side of the truckle-bed and played aimlessly with the coverlet. She had come to the cottage intent on asking aid ; but Mary Anne Wort's face looked so hard and stern that she lost the thread of speech. The sick woman took the girl's long slim fingers in her hand and regarded them attentively.

"Ay," she burst out, "you be the zame ez the rast o' the maids, ez soon ez you knaws the feel o' money 'tis all over wi' honest work. Ess, vath you be all alike." She spoke with unusual bitterness, and the girl looked at her in surprise.

"Be 'ee angirt agin me?" she asked.

"Why for shud I be angirt agin 'ee?"

"I dunno," Phœbe answered ; "on'y last time I wor here you spoke terribly kindzome, and to-day——" she stopped short. "I wanted to ax 'ee zommat speshil, and I can't find wuds nohow."

The sick woman's eyes grew less fierce in expression, but not a muscle of her face relaxed. "Ax on," she said.

Phœbe dropped on her knees beside the bed, burying her face in the faded patch-work quilt. "Tiddn't no light thing to ax aught when folks veels unfriendzome agin 'ee," she replied.

"Who told 'ee I wor unfriendzome?"

"You bain't the zame Anne that wor alles that mortal kind to me," the girl protested.

A curious change passed over the sick woman's face. "Ay," she exclaimed harshly, "I bain't the zame—us can't bide by what us knaws is wrong and be the zame ez us wor when us strove to act uprightful."

Phœbe, full of her own troubles, paid scant heed to those of her friend. "Things ha' gone mortal sore agin me ever since I took thickey fifteen pun," she said. "I want 'ee to help me, Anne. Happen you can do a deal more to mend matters than you reck-ons on."

The dying woman turned her eyes away from the girl and stared out across the moor. "There iddn't no mending to sich ez thic," she said; "leastways not the sort o' mending you're minded on. Sin be like touchwood; you can neither mend it nor mend wi' it."

"'Tiddn't for mezulf I ax," the girl interrupted eagerly. "I knaws wull enough that there iddn't nort this side o' the grave that 'ull gi' me back the name of honest woman agin. Thic be a small cost set agin the harm I worked to other folk." She stopped a moment and scanned the hard face of the listening woman, then, taking her courage in both hands, continued rapidly—"Silas Trustgore has a letter o' mine. Picked un up on the moor, and if ut should vall into the hands of Varmer Pigott maybe ill wud come o' ut. I want 'ee to ax un for ut; happen he'll gi' it to 'ee, tho' he wudn't to no wan ulse; you being tokened wan to t'other, zo to speak."

Anne shivered. "Us bain't tokened wan to t'other," she said.

The expression of hope died out of the girl's face; she rose to her feet. "Then there iddn't no mortal soul to stand atwixt Dan and the wrong I've done him"—her voice in its emotion ringing hard as hail on stone.

The dying woman leant forward and laid a gaunt hand on Phoebe's shoulder. "Did

you steal they fifteen pun for the sake o' Dan Pigott?" she asked. "Ay," she continued, as the girl made no reply, "I suspicioned ez much from the vust. Vule, vule, ye reckoned to stave off harm from they you loved by acting unrightful yerzulf, and now you vinds you've on'y brought fresh evil upon 'em. Ess, vath, you ha' shielded 'em yesterday, maybe, but yer can't termarrer."

"Oh Anne, cudn't 'ee git thic letter nohow?" the girl exclaimed imploringly. "Silas Trustgore be a hard man, a hard man. You don't know," she continued, forgetting Anne's feeling in the urgency of her cause—"no wan knows what he may drive the lad into doing—he's bin cruel wicked to Dan from the vust. You did well not to be tokened to sich ez he."

Anne turned on her fiercely. "Who told 'ee that I wud ha' nought to do wi' un?" she asked. "Bain't I marked for death, and do 'ee reckon Silas Trustgore wud wed a corpse? And ez for that sweetheart o' yers, he's a poor slack-willed squallop at best, for all he's zo upstanding in the limbs. Take 'un to bits and you'll find he's jest no more than noth-

ing nailed together to look like a man. Don't 'ee make no mistake, and be after laying the sins o' the weak at the door o' the strong; there be apples that 'ull rot whether you stores 'em wide apart or close 'pon tap warr t'other. 'Tiddn't the rubbing shoulders wi' Silas or any other man that's bin the ruining o' he——"

She was stopped short by a terrible fit of coughing that seemed to wrench the strength out of her; it was almost as if her life was stretched upon a rack and torn apart inch by inch. Watching, Phœbe's anger was swallowed up in compassion. She put her arms round and held the tortured woman close against her breast, striving to quell the fierceness of the paroxysm with her own strength of youth. "Dear heart, but 'tis hard to see 'ee suffer zo!" she exclaimed.

Anne let her head fall back on the girl's shoulder. "The body iddn't everything," she gasped feebly; "I wor niver wan to take much count o' coughs."

Gazing down on the grim face, set hard to meet death as it had been in facing life, Phœbe wondered dimly what it was that had

had the power to work so great a change. "Tiddn't noways like 'ee to be ailing," she said.

A smile played for a moment about the lips of the dying woman.

"I wor niver wan to take much count o' coughs and sich," she repeated; "but there, death 'ull make my bed for all o' thic. Not," she continued proudly, "that he's had his way wi' me the zame ez he does wi' t'other folk. No; he cudn't ha' touched me if I'd chosen to act different. But I took the worm that dieth not and laid it on my breast, ay, wi' my own hands I took it; and there be thic in conscience that be fierce to kill."

Filled with compassion, Phœbe pressed her closer. "Anne," she exclaimed, "why do 'ee let yertzulf suffer zo? Why wull 'ee set yertzulf up agin God?"

The dying woman laughed harshly. "And agin you too, maybe," she said.

"What do 'ee mean?"

"Ay, you may wull ax!"

A sudden suspicion darkened Phœbe's face. "Tiddn't that you cud ha' saved the lad all this long while, and haven't?" she said.

The flagellant's exultant smile when he feels the self-inflicted embrace of the lash, played around Mary Anne Wort's mouth. "Ay," she admitted, "maybe I cud ha' stepped in."

For a moment the smile gleamed harsh against the agony of reproach in the girl's eyes, and then Phœbe spoke.

"Oh, Anne, save 'un!" she entreated; "save 'un! 'Tiddn't too late, if on'y you'll stand atwix 'un and Silas."

The words rang through the small white-washed kitchen, echoing away over the moor, and long after silence had again imposed itself they seemed to the dying woman to be beating clamorously against her breast. Drawing herself upright she turned a rigid face upon the girl. "Git ye gone!" she said; "who be you that you shud reckon to succeed where the Almighty Hiszulf has failed?"

CHAPTER XXIII

SARAH EMMET SPENDS AN EVENING WITH SILAS TRUSTGORE

SILAS did not sleep at the inn, but rented a two-roomed cottage at the upper end of the village. It was Monday, the night of his appointment with Dan, and the hostler sat waiting for his arrival in the small low-ceilinged kitchen. The room was barely furnished,—a couple of shelves, a deal table and chair, and in the window some fuchsias, no longer in flower. Through the door opening into the adjoining room could be seen a rough plank-bed; beside it stood a bucket and a tin of sand. A Manx cat, grown lean from a too generous indulgence in blackbeetles, sat in front of the fire; there seemed something a trifle lacking about her appearance, being formed by nature without a tail, and having lost an eye and

three parts of an ear in a scuffle with the butcher's dog.

The church clock struck eight, and Silas rose and put away the supper things, first peering into the jug and horn cup to see if any cider remained at the bottom.

"Poor ropy stuff compared to what it wor in my father's time," he said. "Folks ain't got the zame knack o' doing things now-adays." As he spoke a knock sounded on the door. Silas halted a moment. "There he be, zure enough," he exclaimed irritably. "'Pon my Sam he lies that heavy on the gorge o' me I'd a deal liefer spue the wambly gawkin out and be done wi' un."

Moving slowly to the door he unbarred it (he always kept the lock turned against possible intruders), and saw, not Dan, whom he had expected, but Sarah Emmet, the little hump-backed layer-out.

"Good evening to 'ee, Mr. Trustgore," she said, in a high piercing voice, peering up into his face. "I thought maybe I wud jest drap in, there being wan or two zmall matters I wanted to have a tell wi' 'ee over."

"You be welcome," replied Silas, holding

the door wide open for her to enter. "Happen there be a fresh death in the parish?" he continued, his curiosity aroused. "'A green fall makes a full churchyard,' and us have had a deal o' rain—a deal o' rain."

Sarah Emmet seated herself, spreading out her skirts.

"Ess, vath, the weather has bin soft enough. There hasn't been nought to complain of agin the weather; but us haven't had our rightful share o' deaths for all o' thic," she answered in a grudging tone. "People be getting more pernicky about dying, now that doctors' stuff be cheaper, that's my opinion. Law, in my poor mother's time 'twor kill or cure, and folks knowed it and did their part; they wud come under her hands wonderful unconsarned, her baing layer-out in they days zame ez I be now. 'Twor the suiting o' the mind to the circumstances that helped 'em droo, a nater not easy come by in these here spendthrift days. I ain't got no patience wi' yer modern man, born wi' wan skin the less and a score o' needs the more; he's took the sap out o' life wi' his hothouse ways till he's neither the

grit to live nor to die. There's Sally Bartlett, now, up to Orr; her were born puling, and lived wi' wan vut in the grave ever since; but no zooner do you go for to reckon that t'other vut be bound to valler, her whips the vust wan out and tucks un up in the warm ez coddlezome ez a swaddled babe. Mark my wuds, though, her'll not profit by it in the end; her'll be forced to come under my hands wan day, be the time long or be it short, and when her does——" she was silent a moment, stretching out her long hook-shaped fingers to the warmth—"when her does," she continued, "I shall give her a cheap compose, zame ez I gies the blue-cottoned up to the Union."

Silas pulled a box forward and seated himself beside her; the Manx cat, occupying a position between host and guest, turned an empty eye-socket now on the man, now on the woman.

"You have the last zay wi' most folk, there's no denying that," he replied, registering a secret vow to keep on good terms with a person of such far-reaching powers.

Sarah Emmet bowed in acknowledgment.

"Ez they leaves my hands zo they must bide till they rise to Jidgement," she said.

A shiver passed through Silas. "The thought o' ut must let loose the mussy in 'ee."

She turned her slow searching gaze upon him. "They twisty limbs o' yers 'ud take a deal o' straightening," she exclaimed meditatively; "but there, I cud do ut if I wor a mind to; 'twud take time, but I cud do ut."

The hostler's yellow skin grew grey, and he burst into an uneasy laugh. "Death won't have me yit along," he answered. "I wor no but saxty-five come last Martinmas."

"Each year wull make the task o' straightening 'ee harder."

"Do 'ee reckon zo?" replied Silas shakily.

The deformed woman sighed.

"'Twull take it out o' both o' us," she said, "and I ain't the woman I wor wance. Ten years back I cud ha' straightened 'ee out, taken me glass o' cider, and gone home wi'out a rast. Now tez like ez not I shall have to draw on the tap atween each limb."

Silas sank his face between his hands, and something resembling a groan burst from his

lips. "S'posing," he said, "s'posing the dead wor 'live enough to feel?"

"They does feel," Sarah Emmet replied, "in spirut."

There was silence in the room. Without, the rain could be heard falling heavily. "God ha' mussy on us!" he exclaimed, "God ha' mussy on us!" Rising after a moment, he picked up the horn and tottered, rather than walked, to where in a corner of the room stood the cask of cider. He filled and re-filled the cup. "I've a thirst on me; I've a thirst on me," he said.

The Manx cat remained unmoved by the gurgle of the cider as it poured down from the tap into the mug; but the woman regarded it enviously. "Maybe I'll try a drap mezulf," she said at last.

Silas, not daring to refuse, replenished the horn with grudging hands and carried it to his guest.

"'Tis poor muck," he answered, "not a sizable apple went to the mak o'ut, and they that did go worn't none o' 'em Redstreaks."

"'Tiddn't bad for all o' that," she answered, emptying the cup at a draught. "I'll try

another horn. You may brim it this time,—I've a fine steady hand."

He acceded unwillingly. "Ah!" she exclaimed, wiping her lips on the back of her hand, "there's a deal o' comfort to be got out o' drink taken circumspect: not that I often indulges in the zame, and when I does I finds mezulf looking round for the corpse unconscious." Her eyes fell on the hostler, who started visibly.

"You've seen your best days, Silas Trustgore; 'twon't be no mortal length o' time before I lays you out. I can most feel my hands upon 'ee now. I can zee 'ee lying on thic bed there," she nodded in the direction of the plank-bed, "wi' the pennies 'pon tap yer eyes, the cere-cloth beneath yer chin, and that poor twisted body o' yers sort o' imploring o' me to deal tenderzome by ut. But I shall be firm; I shall be firm."

She was silent a moment, contemplating the vision which she had called up, and her teeth shut with a snap.

"O Lard! O Lard!" groaned the hostler; "death be a creepacious thing; 'tis turrible to lie thic dependzome wi'out zo much ez a

screech in 'ee to warn folks o' what ye may be zuffering."

The hump-backed woman took a long slow sip of the cider.

"There be wan pussen," she exclaimed reflectively, "who I shall lay out joyzome."

"Tiddn't me that you be thinking of?" asked Silas tremulously.

"Na; I shall take 'ee all in my day's wark; lest you happen to play up the contrary wi' me, then I shud larn 'ee."

"Who be ut then?"

"Why, Phœbe Hazeldene."

"Phœbe Hazeldene! Why, her iddn't half yer age; death won't take her in your time."

"Who knows? long life don't alles lie in front o' the young."

"But what makes 'ee feel like thic agin the maid?"

"Her holds herself for so wonderful fine featured, I can't abide the sight o' her and her pay-cock ways. I zeed her laughing at me wance, her reckoned I didn't mark her, but I did. Ah ain't got no patience wi' ye personable women."

Silas made no reply, but sat immersed in thought, staring into the fast-sinking fire.

"If on'y it hadn't been lawed that us all must die," he exclaimed at last.

"Ay, us must all come to ut," she rejoined. "There's Mary Anne Wort now; they tull me the doctor drawed her over this marning."

Silas jumped to his feet. "Be ut truth you're tulling me?" he said.

"Ess, vath, 'tis truth enough. What makes 'ee zo scart——"

"Then, then——," he exclaimed, and stopped short.

Going to the table he took up his cap and staggered rather than walked from the room.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LETTER CHANGES HANDS

A QUARTER of an hour later Silas was riding in the direction of Mary Anne Wort's cottage. The natural human affections had played but a scant part in his life, and he wondered to himself as he rode along what it was that compelled him to seek out this woman before death raised an impassable barrier between them. He was still shaken from his interview with Sarah Emmet; in some subtle way she seemed to have brought his own death nearer to him, and the knowledge that he too must some day die was indescribably dreadful to Silas. "I bain't coffin-ripe yit," he muttered; "no wan cud hold me for coffin-ripe yit."

The rain had ceased; high up over his head the clouds pressed the harried moon close. Leaving the plantations behind, he

struck out across the moor; the boulders assumed strange shapes in the cold grey light, and the inky bog waters looked more dark and treacherous. Silas glanced neither to the right nor to the left. "The dead feels," he muttered; "the dead feels."

A pollard thorn caught his coat, making him shiver and shrink together as if he already felt the grip of death upon him. He burst into a volley of curses. "I'll stay no longer in this here vullage," he said. "I'll not give thickey hook-backed toad the chance o' playing hanky-panky wi' my corpse. If 'tworn't for Dan Pigott I'd hike to furren parts terrmarrer; but there's money in the sniveying slack-twist. Wance I've done wi' he I'll let vules bide. I'm grawing old. Sin be a risky bisness when a man is gitting up along in years. I'll wring him dry, and then I take up my lot wi' the saved; I shan't cad-dle away my time when wance I gits to wark. Maybe I'll turn chapelite: they be alles a mort surer o' Heaven than yer church-folks, handling the Lord more boldacious."

The lights from the cottage windows suddenly flashed across his path, causing the

pony to swerve. Dismounting, Silas tied the animal to a fence and knocked at the door. It was opened by a tired pale-faced woman, whom he recognised as Jane Cripps, the wife of the village cobbler. She eyed him suspiciously.

"Be that 'ee, Silas Trustgore?" she said. "Her's had your name on her lips off and on a deal during the night; though I reckon her's bin wandering most o' the time, poor soul."

"The doctor's thraved her over, ain't he?"

"Ess, this morning. 'Tworn't no matter o' use his biding here, her's not baing a death that 'ull take easing from mortal hands. But there—you'd best come right along in, you're gitting yer fill o' cold standing on thickey steps. Her iddn't in the kitchen no longer; her bed's carried upstairs agin; zed her wud die atween the zame four walls her fether and mother did afore her."

Silas entered the kitchen, trying to tread softly. He went to the window-box, and with an instinctive movement pressed the earth round the roots of the flowers. "They be dry, mortal dry," he said.

The woman cast an indifferent glance at the flowers. "I haven't had time to tend to 'em," she answered; "what wi' charring all day and sitting up wi' Anne at night, I cud most sleep where I stand; but there, her'll not last much longer now, though her dies hard, poor soul, her dies hard."

"What do 'ee reckon ails her?" he asked, trying to steady his voice. "I alles reckoned her wor wan for making old bones."

The woman shook her head. "Her don't zim built for dying, 'tis true—or her wudn't ha' lasted ez long ez her has. Folks sez her's dying o' the lonesome-fret; but 'tis more than that. Her's got zommat on her mind; there iddn't nought ekal to a dringed back conscience for eating the life out o' wan."

Silas turned away. "Her ain't niver done nothing black. Why for shud her have the death-worrit?"

The woman flung some turf on the fire. "Outsiders bain't no proper jidge o' sich matters," she answered. "But there's no mistaking the death-worrit if wance you've zeen it. Hark!" she continued, holding up her hand; "her's calling on 'ee."

Silas crept to the foot of the stairs and peered up, but he failed to distinguish the words; the pulses in his head beat out all sound but their own. "What be her zaying?" he asked tremblingly; "I can't sort o' fix ut."

"Jest yer name auver and auver. Stap up; happen the sight o' 'ee 'ull act soothing."

"No," he said, drawing back with a shudder; "I reckon I'll bide where I am."

"Ez yer wull; but the poor soul is calling on 'ee painful."

"Death be a creepacious thing—a creepacious thing," he exclaimed huskily. "I'd a deal liefer bide where I am." Impelled even as he spoke by some power other than his will, he began slowly to ascend the stairs. The voice of the dying woman rang against him, and he put up his hands, warding it back. "I'd liefer not come," he muttered; "I'd liefer not come."

There was no door between the landing and the bedroom, and at the head of the stairs he found himself suddenly in the presence of Mary Anne Wort. The light from the tall candle fell upon her grey face and on her

hands that picked restlessly with the clothes. She lay staring straight in front of her, with eyes that seemed to have lost the power of vision, and from her shrivelled lips came the hoarse persistent cry—"Silas, Silas, Silas!"

His knees knocked together. "I be here, Anne. What wud 'ee have o' me?"

At the sound of his voice she made a convulsive effort, struggling to raise herself, but could not; and he marked how the life rippled back into her half-dead face.

"Come closer; my eyes ha' grown dim."

He did as she desired. "What wud 'ee have o' me?" he asked again.

"I be dying," she gasped—"dying; and there bain't no hope out there, none. There bain't no faces; the Almighty bain't there, nor the Lord Jesus; there bain't no path—nought but dark, stretching on and on and on. I can't hold back from it, do what I wull I'm fosed forrard, fosed forrard. In my ears, there be a chime o' a mort o' voices; but wan I hears above all the rest, and it sounds like Dan Pigott's voice . . . and there's a wail in it, the zame ez the wail o' a damned

soul . . . and it witnesses continually afore God agin me and agin you”

The sweat poured down Silas' face as he listened. “Say a wud to the Lord for me,” he begged; “’tis the eleventh hour, but ’tidn’t too late. You’ve lived upstanding, He’ll hark to you. Tull Him about your good work, and how you ha’ alles gone to church come storm come fine. Plead for me, Anne. Don’t let Him listen to the lad’s prayers.”

“’Tis dark, dark,” she answered; “even the gert white throne has ceased to shine . . . I can’t find me way to it droo the dimmet; but if I flung mezulf face down ’pon tap the staps what wud it profit? . . . The Almighty wud’nt heed while that voice testifies on”

“Speak for me, Anne; speak for me!” he pleaded, sinking on his knees beside the bed. “Tull Him I be reckoning to ha’ done wi’ evil ways and repent. Tull Him I have put by a tidy bit o’ money, and shan’t be uncharitable to them that goes in need o’ it.”

“’Tis dark . . . dark” she repeated,—“I can’t find the gert white throne, and what wud it profit if I flung mezulf face

down 'pon tap the staps . . . the Almighty wudn't heed while that voice testified on"

"But I'll be easier wi' the lad ; I'll no ruin him," Silas cried in a terror-stricken voice. "Zee," he continued, fumbling with trembling fingers in the lining of his cap, "zee, here be the letter. I ain't never showed it to Varmer Pigott, though I've had a mort o' temptation. Take it, Anne, lay it afore the Almighty—the lad can't witness agin me then."

He pressed the letter into her hand and her fingers closed upon it with the stiff grip of death. Her eyes turned back in their sockets, leaving only the white exposed: she opened her lips—a curious sound, half gurgle, half rattle, forced itself between them, and she fell forward on her face—dead.

He bent over and shook the prostrate form. "Testify, testify!" he shrieked.

She paid no heed to him.

Then he tried to take the letter from her: but she would neither give it up nor witness for him.

CHAPTER XXV

SARAH EMMET'S REVENGE

THE wind dropped at dawn, and frost held both hill and dale. In Mary Anne Wort's garden the flowers hung black and listless from their stalks; some had fallen forward on their faces, others peered out at the moor, which swept past, savage, desolate, as indifferent to their fate as to any that might some day overtake itself. The door of the cottage was locked, and within the dead woman lay and stared up with eyes that seemed to follow her spirit in its flight from the body. The hours crept past, marked only by the noiseless settling of dust that fell unceasingly on everything alike. Towards noon Sarah Emmet arrived in a meagre cart drawn by a still more meagre donkey. She had received the news of the death, together with the key of the

cottage, early in the day. Unlocking the door, she took a business-like survey of the kitchen.

"There iddn't much that I covets here," she remarked. "Happen the upper rooms 'ull be more fruitful. Law," she continued; "what pickings there must lie round the laying out of a royal head!"

Climbing the stairs, she stood a few minutes later in the presence of the dead woman. She drew nearer, and looked down on the fierce gaunt face that was stamped with the isolation, but not with the repose, of death.

After a moment her glance strayed round the room and then back again to the dead woman, and doing so she caught sight of the letter round which Anne's fingers still closed firmly. At this moment there was the sound of knocking on the door below; but the little hump-back, preoccupied in forcing open the dead woman's hand, paid no heed to it.

Slowly Mary Anne Wort's hold on the letter loosened, it slipped from her fingers, and fell on to the floor. Picking it up, the

little hump-back carried it to the window for closer examination.

Below, the knocking had ceased; there was the sound of steps on the stairs, and Phoebe, for it was she, entered the room. Engrossed in reading, Sarah Emmet did not at first perceive the girl's presence, and, when she did so, a leer of triumph rippled across her face.

"So you've bin trying to kindiddle that bosky-headed Dan Pigott into marrying. Happen you reckons he be vule enough for anything. The varmer 'ull put a pinch o' salt in that tart for 'ee when he hears o' yer karrings on. Ha shall have the reading o' this letter afore the hour is out. Ay, us all knawed that when you took to stealing 'twor zommat more than the money you had in mind. Oh, you be a deep wan—you be!"

Inert from astonishment and powerless before the woman's coarse invective, Phoebe stood for a moment silent, then she made a quick step forward.

"What right ha' 'ee by thickey letter! How did 'ee come by ut?" she exclaimed.

"You audacious baggage, standing purdling to me o' right! You that be marked for thief the whole country-side over," Sarah Emmet answered. "But then I ain't going to waste wuds on 'ee——"

She moved to the door as she spoke; the girl ran after her. "Don't 'ee be zo cruel," she cried, "you'll hurt more'n me if you show Varmer Pigott thic letter."

Sarah Emmet pattered down the stairs. "I shall do my duty, zarrer who may for it," she called back. A few minutes later she had left the house, and Phoebe, watching from the window, saw her drive away in the direction of the farm.

Intent on her errand of revenge, the hump-backed woman drove steadily on, her ill-shaped body and great head swaying from side to side as the cart bumped its way across the moor. Raising her stick, she was about to bring it down on the donkey, when she caught sight of the pedlar coming leisurely towards her leading a pack-horse. She halted the cart and awaited his nearer approach with ill-concealed impatience.

"Wud 'ee like to hear zommat tasty?"

she cried, bending forward and tapping him on the arm.

He looked up at the malignant face without repulsion—rather with a wide tolerance; as if he saw not the evil thing that the woman had become, but rather the adverse causes that had conduced to her soul's downfall.

"Wull," he answered, "I've dawdled away a deal o' time this afternoon; I reckon I shud be wiser to press on a bit."

But the little hump-back was not to be denied. "Do 'ee knaw for why Phoebe Hazeldene stole they fifteen puns?" she asked.

He started at the mention of the girl's name, the blood reddening under his tanned skin. "No," he said slowly.

Sarah Emmet drew herself upright and surveyed the pedlar with satisfaction; his face had lost its expression of indifference—the man was evidently interested.

"La!" she exclaimed, "I shudn't ha' held 'ee for baing a gossip-lover. But there—I'll ax 'ee zommat else. Where did Dan Pigott git the money from to buy his discharge? Answer me thic?"

There was a long silence. Ben bent down

and picked up a small pebble and shuffled it backwards and forwards in the palm of his hand.

"I reckon," he said at last, "tiddn't no business o' mine."

"Ay, but 'tiz," she answered quickly; "'tiz the business o' all right-minded folk to point the vinger o' scorn at the evil-doer. He got the money from Phœbe Hazeldene, and her stole the zame, reckoning to kindiddle 'un into marrying her; for if wan thing be more sartin than another, 'tiz hers bin casting sheep's eyes at the lad from the vust. Oh! her's a brazen piece, a true darter o' Babylon; but her'll no profit: there wor niver a sinner yit that profited when it comed to the last."

"Her's a better woman than you be, and ez sich you shudn't take on yezulf to jidge her," said the pedlar, raising his head and looking her full in the eyes.

"Better'n me! Be you market merry, Ben Tap, or off your chump, or what? Why, I have the proof of all I zay, writ by the maid's own hand." She drew out the letter and held it up. "Afore another day

be out the parish shall jidge which be the better woman, her or me." So saying she struck the donkey a violent blow and drove on, leaving the pedlar alone. He made no attempt to pursue his way, but instead stood staring out over the plain.

"So 'twor for the lad her tooked the money," he exclaimed. "Poor maid! Wull, I kind o' reckoned zo from the vust. Now he'll be ruined for sartin, and 'twull go nigh to breaking her heart. Phoebe, maid, poor voolish maid!"

Scanning the far horizon, his eyes rested listlessly at first, then with quickened interest, on the figure of a woman. He ascended a small hillock and watched her approach. She drew rapidly nearer, breaking from time to time into a run.

"Vath, 'tiz Phoebe's zulf," he said. "Gwaying to vind the lad. Cudn't bide away from him now his day of trouble's come."

Returning to where his horse stood, the pedlar unlashed the pack from the saddle and hid it behind a big stone. Phoebe came closer; he could hear her breath sobbing through her parted lips. Raising his head,

he saw that she had passed him by unheeding. He ran after her, and putting out his hand, detained her gently.

"Zee," he exclaimed, pointing to the horse, "us be travelling the zame road; you'd a deal wiser ride."

Intent on her own thoughts, the meaning of his words escaped her. "Let me be, Ben," she answered, "or I shall be too late."

He moved beside her, leading the horse. Again she broke into a run, then pressing her hand to her side, slackened pace. Seeing her distress, he bent and, without a word, swung her lightly up to the saddle. Phoebe raised no protest. "Be you passing Pigott's farm?" she asked.

The pedlar nodded. Silently they moved across the moor, that looked black and sodden beneath the cold sky. A yellow-hammer flew out from a stone ridge and sent its wailing note after them. The girl sat straining forward, searching the horizon with her eyes, and, watching her, Ben's heart grew hot with pity. A vision of Dan's weak, handsome face rose before him, and the pity changed to bitterness. Why, he asked himself, did

she love this man? Then, like a wave of blood, his own love and its implacable needs rushed over him.

By some subtle instinct the girl divined his feeling. "I won't need to trouble 'ee further," she said, and before he could protest she had slipped down from the saddle and fled along the path that led to her lover's home.

Ben stood and watched till the moor, descending abruptly, hid her from view.

CHAPTER XXVI

MRS. PIGOTT CONSIDERS THE MATTER

EXPOSURE seeming inevitable, sullen despair took possession of Dan; utterly unnerved, he gave up the struggle and waited for fate to do its worst. Tuesday morning he spent wandering round the farm, returning to the house for the midday meal; but his appetite had deserted him, and rising from the table, he went to his room and locked the door. Mrs. Pigott's fat face creased anxiously as she glanced after her favourite; but the old farmer eyed his nephew's broad shoulders with evident disfavour.

"What the mischief has he bin arter now," he exclaimed. "No good, mark me. I'm jest about full up o' un and his ways."

"You are always ready to be hard on the lad, Sam," his wife answered, and she put

aside a mutton pasty nicely browned and done to a turn, hoping that later it might serve to tempt Dan's appetite.

Afterwards, when the farmer went back to his work, Mrs. Pigott unlocked a cupboard where she kept some sloe-gin, made by her own hands and of great repute in the neighbourhood, and having poured out a glass, she placed it, together with the pasty, on a tray, and carried it up to her nephew's room. Dan opened the door unwillingly; but he drank the sloe-gin as if he had been craving for the taste of spirits.

"I cudn't eat nought—'twud come nigh to choking me," he said. Going to the window, he stared down, expecting each moment to see Silas ride into the yard. His nerves were strained to breaking point: he longed to confide in his aunt; he wanted some one stronger than himself to lean on, to see him through. He turned and looked into her kindly face, and for a moment entertained a wild hope that she might suggest some way of extricating him from his difficulties at the eleventh hour.

"Aunt," he said, "you've alles bin good to

me, even though you know wull enough I bain't up to much——"

"Us all have our faults," she answered, "tho' us generally begins to mind on 'em when us should be wiser employed heartening ourselves by adding up our vartues."

"Vartues," he repeated bitterly, "vartues and me ba a long cry wan from t'other." Going to the bed, he sat down, sinking his face in his hands.

She made no immediate reply, and, with an unconscious movement, smoothed back the bands of fair hair under her cap.

"Wi'out our faults to larn us, how shud us know which way vartue lay?" she said at length. "Folks have to thank their faults for a deal more than they reckons. La, bless us, to hear the way they cries out over their mistakes, one could most believe it wasn't human nature to fail; but I'd have 'em remember that human nature isn't all gold for one and muck for t'other, 'tis gold and muck pretty well mixed for all alike. Yes, yes; the more I see of life the less perfection I expect to find in it: faults be as natural to man as the air he breathes, the

wonder is he's got room for the vartues he has."

The old woman's philosophy had a comfortable sound, but Dan was past comforting. "I've done that," he exclaimed, "which when uncle comes to hear o' ut—and hear o' ut he must—he'll tarn me out o' the varm sure ez fate."

Mrs. Pigott's face slowly lost its florid look of health. "Whativer have you done?" she asked.

Dan drew up his knees and put his arms round them. "I didn't make for to do wrong at the vust go off," he said.

"'Tis the way wi' us all," exclaimed the old woman, half to herself.

"The fact be," he continued, "if other folk had acted ez they shud—I shud ha' done the zame."

"Don't 'ee say that, lad; 'tis always well to leave other folk's names out o' such matters—simplicates things, so to speak."

"Happen in this case I can't leave 'em out," he answered roughly. "You knaw when Phoebe Hazeldene stole they fifteen pun! wull, her sent ut to me to buy my dis-

charge wi'; but her niver zed her'd stole ut, niver breathed a wud to me that her'd stole ut," he repeated, his voice taking on a keen note of indignation.

Mrs. Pigott sank down on the bed beside her nephew. "Well, well, well; dear, dear, dear," she exclaimed, raising her hands, "the poor mistaken lass; the poor foolish maid. Well, well; dear, dear!"

Dan stared at her, not a little astonished. "You don't zim to zee my zide o' ut," he interposed, his accent broadening in his excitement. "How her led me on to think zommat altogether different from wutt 'twor."

"Ay, lad, I see; but there's the maid's side too, poor soul. What sorrow her's brought on herself, and her that young! her niver so much as breathed the name o' 'ee in connection wi' it; niver accused 'ee; niver tried to protect herself. Well, well; dear, dear!"

"But I niver axed her to stale the money, didn't so much ez knaw 'twor stoled," he exclaimed, supremely irritated. His aunt looked at him, but made no answer, and the shame which he was incapable of feeling reddened her face. A long, long silence en-

sued ; little by little there came to Dan a faint, far-off perception of his own meanness.

"You reckon I've acted real bad to her?" he exclaimed at last.

"I can't say otherwise."

"Wutt wud 'ee have me do?"

Mrs. Pigott sighed. "Some things you can't mend," she answered; "but for your own sake, you must tell yer uncle. He'd never forgive 'ee if such a tale came to his ears from any other lips but your own."

"Tull uncle!" exclaimed Dan, jumping to his feet.

"'Tis your one chance, lad."

"I'd liefer vace ut out avor the vullage."

The old woman rose from the bed and laid a hand on her nephew's arm. "Dan," she said, "do 'ee reckon 'tis ever easy to do right?"

"Noo," he answered slowly, "but — but——"

"You owes the truth to the maid."

"To the maid?" he repeated, in a dazed voice.

The old woman's eyes filled with tears;

then she put her motherly arms round him and drew him closer.

"Lad," she exclaimed, "have 'ee suffered yourself through all this?"

"Ay, ain't I zuffered; ain't I jest zuffered."

"Then don't 'ee reckon Phœbe's suffered too?"

He was silent; through the open window came the familiar sounds of farm-life. At last he spoke. "My God!" he exclaimed hoarsely, "I belave her's zuffered more'n me."

He walked with an unsteady step to the corner of the room where his gun stood against the wall: he picked it up, opened the breech, and stared down the empty barrels.

"I ain't niver zackly reckoned things out clear-like," he said; "and it alles zimed to me that if Phœbe hadn't stealed the money I shudn't ha' had no call to do thic that be shameful, and the thought o' ut has made me veel sort o' hard towards her; but, but I'll tull uncle, I'll zee her righted—on'y I might jest ez wull bide zilent, for Silas Trustgore 'ull be after telling un anyways."

"Ay, but 'tis a deal better for 'ee to tell him yourself."

"I'll tell un, I'll tell un right enow," Dan answered hurriedly.

"Well, go right away and do it while the mind is on 'ee; he's down by the white gate; one of the allums fell last night and tore up the bank."

"They iddn't no sich windervul hurry; but ther, I'll gaw." He picked up the gun and moved towards the door. "Happen I shall drap on a rabbut."

Mrs. Pigott followed him and put her hand on his shoulder. "Don't hark back from doing it when it comes to the last, lad," she said. "'Tis what us all be tempted to do."

"You don't belave in me," he said. "You reckons I'll alles turn tail when ut comes to facing things."

"To do right is mortal hard for the best o' us," she answered evasively.

"But you don't belave in me," he repeated. "You holds I bain't made o' the stuff that wins droo?"

She was silent a moment. "I believe in the Almighty," she said at last. "If I didn't,

I shudn't believe in man, not if he was the greatest saint that ever walked the earth."

"Ay, God Almighty!" he answered with concentrated bitterness: "God Almighty don't help a man the zame ez you reckons He wud from reading the Bible and sich."

Then he went out and left her.

CHAPTER XXVII

SILAS AND DAN

DAN had not walked far from the house before a sudden turn in the lane brought him face to face with the hostler. A small larch spinney had concealed the approach of one man from the other. Silas was leading his pony, the bridle over his arm: black bog mud was splashed about his boots and corduroys: he had spent the night wandering on the moor. His yellow face had a sapless look, as if the vitality in him had been sucked dry; he seemed aged by many years. Dan did not mark the change; facing his enemy all his newly formed resolutions deserted him: he put out his hand deprecatingly.

"Tiddn't no use axing for the money; I ain't got ut," he said.

"No matter; no matter," Silas answered reluctantly. With the return of daylight his

superstitious fears had deserted him, and he regretted having parted with the letter. "I've changed my mind. I be gwaying to act good by 'ee. I've alles wished 'ee wull: 'twor your own nat'rel backsliding that's brought 'ee nigh to ruin."

Dan was too astonished to take in the full meaning of the words. "Wutt do 'ee mean?" he stuttered. "Bain't 'ee gwaying to show uncle thic letter?"

At the mention of the letter an expression of disgust crossed the hostler's face. He hated to think that he had been so easily moved. "Noo, noo," he replied hastily; "ain't I been tulling ez how I niver 'tended harm by 'ee from the vust?"

Dan reeled back against a tree. "My God!" he exclaimed, "then I be a free man!" He burst into tears. "I'll act straight now I've got the chance. I'll be a changed man."

"Eh! and glad I am to hear 'ee zay it," Silas answered with sudden zeal. Bending forward he laid a hand on the young fellow's shoulder. "I've let 'ee off cheap," he said. "I s'pose you ain't got no money 'bout 'ee 'tall."

"Vive shilluns," Dan answered, searching in his pockets.

"Wull, wull; vive shilluns," repeated the hostler. "You wor to ha' brought me ten pun;" he stretched out his hand. The young fellow dropped the money into it mechanically.

"I've a lucky saxpence on my watch-chain," he said. "Tak that ez wull." Breaking it off, he handed the sixpence to Silas.

"You might thraw the watch and chain in," exclaimed the hostler as he took and slowly pocketed the little bent coin.

Dan unfastened the watch. "You be a having man, Silas," he said.

The hostler's grip closed upon it. "Ain't I got 'ee in my power, and ain't I acting good by 'ee?"

"You wudn't deceive ez black ez this, wud 'ee?" Dan queried anxiously. "But what have 'ee done wi' the letter?"

"You needn't worrit yerzulf over thic. You'll niver hear no more of the letter after this," replied the hostler. "Now I must be on the move; there's a sea-mist coming up across the moor, and I ain't got no speshil fancy for spending the night 'long o' pixies."

So saying he hoisted himself stiffly into the saddle and rode away.

Dan watched the small bent figure of the old man till the trees, converging, hid it from sight. A wave of exultation swept through him. "I veel," he exclaimed aloud, "I veel most ez if I had got religion—the Almighty hez bin good to me. Ha's a just God, and I'll be a just man. I'll live upright from this day. No more lies for me; no more playing the domned slack-wind." He stopped short; the expression of his face changed. "O God!" he said, "I vorgot Phœbe."

Putting out a hand, he steadied himself against a tree, while the memory of his promise and what its fulfilment implied bored a way through his short-lived happiness. Word by word all that Mrs. Pigott had urged on Phœbe's behalf returned and awoke what was best in him to fresh life.

His lips moved. "Her did ut for me; 'twor all done for me," he muttered. Throwing back his head, he stared up between the bare tree branches at the grey sky, and his heart was pregnant with a nobler music, and from it the first hesitating note of self-sacri-

fice leapt heavenward. "Her's bin true to me, and I swore to right her," he said.

As he stood there, wavering between resolution and irresolution, he saw Farmer Pigott slowly approach from the opposite end of the spinney. For one moment the young fellow hung back, then he sprang forward, down the path to meet his uncle.

"I mustn't stap to think or 'twull be all over wi' me," he muttered. "Uncle," he continued breathlessly, halting in front of the old stern-faced man; "I've zommat to tull 'ee; it's bin lying on my mind this long while. You know Phœbe Hazeldene. You mind on they fifteen pun her took; you alles reckoned ez how I wor at the bottom o' ut. Wull, I——" he stopped short.

"Wutt iver ba 'ee driving at now?" exclaimed the farmer, eyeing the young fellow's pale agitated face with evident distrust.

"I wanted to tull 'ee," Dan persevered, but the words came hesitatingly, "that——" he stopped again.

"That you've bin a domned blackguard all along."

"Noo, noo; not that."

"What, then?"

"I wanted to tull 'ee that—that——"

"Thic money wor stoled for 'ee?"

Fear spattered to bits all that remained of Dan's new-found courage. "Noo, noo; I hadn't nought to do wi' ut. You alles held 'twor me from the vust; but 'tworn't me, 'twor the maid."

The farmer looked at him with growing disfavour. "You banging gert sloppy spirut!" he said; "wutt do 'ee mean wi' coming to me wi' that tale at this time o' day? I shud ha' thought you'd bin content to latt the maid's name alone, jidging ez how you guv'd out that you wor sweet wan 'pon t'other."

In that moment of bitter self-revelation Dan was indifferent to any words of his uncle. "I hain't made of the stuff that wins droo," he exclaimed hopelessly. "I shall niver, niver, play the man."

Unnoticed by either speaker, Sarah Emmet had approached. She drew up her donkey, and, leaning out of the cart, touched the farmer on the shoulder with her stick.

"Well met," she said, a malicious smile

lighting up her face; "I've brought 'ee this letter. Read ut; 'twull go nigh to astonishing 'ee, I reckon. It consarns Phoebe Hazeldene and your nevvv there," she ended nodding in the direction of Dan.

At the mention of his name the young fellow glanced from Sarah Emmet to the letter on which his uncle's fingers had already closed, and realised that the hour of retribution had come at last. Farmer Pigott read the letter slowly through, and then turned back once more to the beginning, the little hump-backed woman watching him with ill-concealed impatience.

Stooping forward, she tapped the letter: "There's deceit for 'ee! There's double-dealing! 'Twor a poor day for the name o' Pigott when that maid comed snoodling in among 'ee all. Nothing short o' the grave-sweat wull free 'ee from sich disgrace."

The farmer glanced grimly back at her. "I don't know how you comed by this letter," he answered; "but there be wan thing I can do wi'out, and thic's your 'pinion consarning ut. Drive right along up t' 'ouse, and if you want aught Mrs. Pigott 'ull

tend to 'ee." So saying, he struck the donkey a smart blow, and Sarah Emmet, astonished and crestfallen, was carried forward out of ear-shot.

For a moment neither of the two men spoke. Turning to his nephew, the farmer started back before the look of mingled hatred and despair that he encountered.

"I tried to tull 'ee the truth," Dan burst out; "I tried to tull 'ee."

"Git ye gone!" the old man replied sternly, "and latt me niver set eyes on thic coward vace o' yourn agin."

Dan did not stir, but stood with white face and quivering lips struggling in vain to put something of what he felt in words.

"Git ye gone!" the old man repeated, "afore I tarn the dogs on 'ee."

"You drashed me into baing afeard o' 'ee ez a lad," Dan answered—"and now"—he stopped short, his stuttering lips refused to work; turning, he began to walk slowly away.

The farmer watched the retreating figure. "Fetch the goon from thickey tree yonder, and put a bullet droo yerzulf," he called out.

Dan took the gun and went down the lane out on to the moor, where the sea-mist drifted in thick grey banks. There was no sound except when he splashed through a few yards of oozy soil, or brushed against a bedrizzled thorn-tree. He walked on: he had no consciousness of what he was doing; his heart was emptied of feeling. Suddenly the fog parted, and he found himself face to face with Silas Trustgore. At the sight of his enemy, the need of revenge came to Dan, streaming down each tingling pulse into his empty heart. Laying the gun on the ground, he gripped the old man round the waist, lifted him from the saddle, and the fog closed in upon them both, so that each saw the other through a grey veil.

Then Dan spoke, and his voice sounded soft and dull, so that he told himself that it was not he that spoke but some other man, or the mist, maybe.

"Me and you," he said, "have a deal to zettle. Look to yerzulf, for either you kills me or I kills you." Then without further words he took his enemy by the throat, and dashed his fist into his face. Swaying back,

Silas grasped at the gun, where it lay muzzle towards Dan on the ground: a spray of heather caught in the trigger, and in a moment the contents of both barrels were lodged in the young fellow's chest. With a half-uttered cry, he fell, rolled a few paces, and lay tearing at the soft turf, along which the blood began to trickle slowly. A brief moment the hostler stood and watched the red stream, then, mounting his pony, he rode away. Far below in the valley a breeze arose, parting the fog into long grey strips, which it caught again and rolled out of sight beyond the high ridges of the moor. The winter sun gleamed coldly on the red farm-buildings, the great yellow stacks of corn; on the alder hedge, the spinney of tall slender larch-trees. Raising himself, Dan looked for the last time at the farm that he loved so well, and for the possession of which he had played so poor a part.

"I wud dearly liked to ha' bin master o' ut wance," he murmured. Then the blood frothing up choked his utterance, and he fell back dead.



